

SERMON ADVENT 2  
JOHN THE BAPTIST  
Godly moments that change lives?

A couple of weeks ago we held our Advent Procession here at the Minster. In that we recognised the solemn nature of the season by beginning the service in darkness. Gradually light spreads into the service until the final chords of the organ herald a burst light into the Nave in anticipation of Jesus Christ our saviour, the light of the world ushering in the kingdom of God.

Imagine what it must feel like though if you are totally devoid of any physical sense of sight or sound.

Helen Keller

was a young woman who through a childhood illness was left both blind and deaf. But she overcame her difficulties and subsequently wrote an autobiography in 1910 about her struggle.

She became the first deaf person to attain a bachelor's degree and an influential campaigner for those with disabilities. She was seen as a powerful advocate for other people trying to overcome difficult circumstances.

She was defined by her courage and faith.

Of her it was said that she had revealed a divine nature in her hope and belief for better.

She said,  
Once I knew the very depth of where no hope was, and  
darkness lay on the face of all things. Then love came and set  
my soul free. Once I knew only darkness and stillness. Now I  
know the spiritual light, joy and rejoicing of life.

\*\*\*\*

Its this spiritual image of light that spurred Helen Keller on  
And the kind of light John the Baptist has before us in the  
reading from John's Gospel this morning. The divine light of  
Christ shining through the darkness of the world.  
John the Baptist reflects that light and bears witness to it but  
he is not the light. He is the voice standing alone in the  
wilderness leading others towards the divine light of Christ.

The first 18 verses of this gospel form the prologue. These  
verses herald Christ, as the Word of God. They reveal the  
eternal strife between light and darkness and the witness  
borne by John, that greatest of the Sons of Israel.

In the sixth verse we have in one moment moved from the  
vast sweep of the Cosmos to a simple solitary person in time.  
John the Baptist, in the desert beside the waters of the  
Jordan heralding crowds to come and be baptized.

His aim is straightforward. He points to Jesus 'makes straight  
the path'.  
He bears witness to the Word so that all will believe through  
him.

He stands between the old ways of the Torah and the new covenant in Christ, a courageous spokesman calling man to repentance and righteousness.

\*\*\*\*

We now have earthly happenings, crucial events that usher in the new creation.

Events not dissimilar from **the week of creation**.

Both the Gospel of John and Genesis 1 open with the words,

*'in the beginning',*

Whilst in Genesis God engages with creation,

Jesus will now engage with a new creation.

John is the eyewitness to the coming Jesus, the voice in the wilderness.

There was much talk about this preacher John who was baptizing people in the river.

He'd attracted a great deal of attention and quite naturally,

perhaps, the authorities enquired **what was this new**

**religious movement**. A deputation of Priests and Levites

were sent from Jerusalem to question him.

**WHO ARE YOU they ask?**

He tells them HE IS NOT THE MESSIAH

Is he ELIJAH then?

Elijah was the great and fiery prophet who Malachi foretold would return before the day of the coming of the messiah.

He was taken to heaven mysteriously in a Chariot burning with fire, they say, without passing through death.

Perhaps John is maybe Elijah returned? (2 kings 2)

I AM NOT

So the Priests and Levites ask if he is 'the prophet',  
Maybe they think he's Moses raised to witness to the light of Christ.

The Jews at that time expected all sorts of prophets to appear before the coming messiah. Maybe then he's another great prophet like Jeremiah? or another?

NO

WHO ARE YOU THEN?

John quotes Isaiah: *(Isaiah 61 and 40)*

I AM the 'voice crying out in the wilderness, making straight the way of the Lord'

He is a witness to the light, but is not the light

Light is such a powerful image

It's a symbol used sixteen times in the Gospel of John, constantly associated with the mission of Jesus.

Right at the beginning of the first chapter we are told that Jesus is the life and the life is the light of man. Darkness is our own self will, doubt and despair, our lack of trust and faith in Jesus Christ our saviour.

John, proclaims the coming light of Christ.  
And Before John, Mary mother of Jesus proclaimed the  
greatness of the Lord  
Before Mary was Isaiah  
Before Isaiah, Moses  
All Witnesses of hope in the Lord  
All Signposts holding a baton for us to pick up

John knew who he was in his discipleship  
Who are we, each one of us, in our walk with Christ?

\*\*\*\*

In our advent procession we signified moving from spiritual  
darkness towards the expectant coming light of Christ using  
our senses. Sight and sound emphasised the spiritual reality  
and experience of Christ coming into our lives.  
Helen Keller lost all those senses but she explained how the  
experience of turning her life around was found in her calling  
to help others,  
A spiritual light, joy and a rejoicing in life.  
Others sensed the light of Christ in her.

There have been several moments in my life that have  
brought me closer to the loving light of Christ but there has  
been one particular moment this year:

Anyone called to licensed ministry goes through a form of testing and discernment and for ordination that takes shape in a three-day Advisory Panel. Like any process afterwards there is a time of waiting, much like Advent, before a phone call reveals the outcome.

When that phone call finally came a report was read to me. There was quite a bit of saying how much the panel had enjoyed meeting me,

How I had integrated and mingled well.

But I can remember sitting there, thinking –

When is he going to get to that bit that says HOWEVER

But however, never came and I sat shocked for quite some time after I realised it was a yes.

I felt a bit like Billy Elliot

Do you remember him?

The film with the boy who wants to dance and waits for his result from the Royal Ballet School

His whole family sit in the kitchen with his letter until he comes home from school and then he shuts himself away behind a closed door to read it alone.

He so shocked with the yes that he just sits there with a cushion on his lap while his family pace up and down outside unaware of his good news

That was me!

But There was something else really important that day -- that I nearly missed.

Many of you here know that a good number of years ago we lost our little girl, Kathryn, when she was five years old, to Leukaemia. It took us a long time to find life again and even longer to find faith. But we have many happy memories and God heals with time .

But what we missed on that day was a light of realisation about the news that called me to train for ordination. That news came on Friday the 12<sup>th</sup> May at 2.45pm in the afternoon. In the emotions of that moment I missed the fact that it was the 12<sup>th</sup> May, on Friday afternoon at 2.45pm that Kathryn was born.

Sometimes there are Godly moments in life that cast a light and tell us who we are in our journey with Christ.

That moment in time changed my life

So, I pray that each one of us will the darkness in our lives is scattered from before our path

So that whatever Christ calls us to do, is revealed in his glorious light ..... AMEN

\*\*\*\*