

## **Meditation for the Third Sunday of Advent**

There is something satisfying about planting spring bulbs in the autumn when many of the plants in the gardens are beginning to fade. It is accompanied by a palpable sense of anticipation of what will burst forth in the Spring, as the first green shoots emerge and the garden begins to erupt in a blaze of colour.

Our Old Testament reading today from Isaiah 35 likewise echoes this theme and it opens with these words: *"The wilderness and the dry land shall be glad; the desert shall rejoice and blossom; like the crocus it shall blossom abundantly and rejoice with joy and singing"*.

The poetic words of Isaiah 35 offered comfort to the exiles of Judah, mourning the loss their temple, land, and sovereignty. The writer looks forward with a hope and expectation to a day when a Godly leader would arise and establish his reign of justice and peace in Jerusalem – a bringer of joy and happiness that would transform the lives of everyone.

By the time that St Matthew's Gospel was written there was still a very palpable expectation that the long-awaited messiah would appear. Israel was eagerly watching and waiting for signs of his arrival but there were differing ideas of what he would be like.

John the Baptist arrives on the scene and had been arrested and imprisoned. I imagine that he was possibly feeling somewhat discouraged. However, he seemed to intuitively know who Jesus was. But perhaps to allay any doubts John sends messengers to ask whether Jesus was indeed the long-awaited Messiah

Interestingly, Jesus does not respond to John the Baptist's direct question "Are you the one who is to come or are we to wait for another?" by saying 'yes'. Rather, he points John (and the listening crowd) to what we might call the signs of the Kingdom of God. What are they?

'The blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the poor have good news brought to them.

Jesus goes on to point out that we should not judge by appearances as citing John the Baptist as a good example – an unconventional man who did not fit the mold. Many in the crowd had heard about John the Baptist and had gone out into the Wilderness to hear him preach. Yet what they saw did not match their expectation. A wild bushman forager dressed in camel hair with a leather belt around his waist. Jesus challenged them – 'What did you go out into the wilderness to look at? A reed shaken by the wind? What then did you go out to see? Someone dressed in soft robes?'

John did not match some people's expectations and likewise neither would Jesus. He would be a very unconventional rabbi, a challenger of the establishment and status quo an irritant to the Jewish religious establishment who thought that they had got it all sorted out.

As we journey through Advent can I invite you to look for signs of where the Kingdom of God is emerging. It may not necessarily be in the most obvious places. But it is happening if we only have the eyes to see.

Fr Andy