



2nd Sunday of Advent 2021 | Sermon by Revd Canon Stan Evans

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ

Sometimes when people point out something that is wrong with us – we can see what they are saying, recognise it as true, but proceed to do nothing about it. We know from experience that insight doesn't necessarily lead us to change. Recognising the truth doesn't always compel us to alter our ways. Particularly when our self-esteem is injured, the truth can have the effect of paralysing us rather than energising us to action. Sometimes the prospect of what the change would involve disheartens us. We feel it's too much; we are too long in the tooth; we are too set in our ways, or we're not ready yet. It takes some doing.

If only though we could imagine the best. In today's readings we hear four voices encouraging people to imagine a good future that God has in store for them. They all invite us to imagine the best and then act accordingly.

The first reading is from the Book of Baruch - written in around 600 BC – one of several books in the Apocrypha – a book compiled or copied from other books in the Hebrew Bible. The prophet reminds the people that they should throw away their mourning attire, and should don

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forever the splendid garments given by God, guarantees and symbols of harmony, security and prosperity. Things are looking up and they should lift their hearts and rejoice. God will be with the exiles with his mercy and his righteousness. For a people in exile, who find themselves in a culture that is not their own, how do they leave what they have in the present, how do they maintain their hopes from the past, and how do they look forward to the future? Could this be true of us this Advent? How do we turn from the gloom and fears of the present day to hope for reconciliation and peace?

Then in his letter to the Philippians, Paul takes a similar line. He compliments the people for helping him in his work, tells them how much he loves them, and invites them to prepare for the day **‘when you will reach perfect goodness’**. Finally, John the Baptist in the Gospel story is travelling around the Jordan district announcing to anyone within earshot the great day to come when ‘all mankind shall see the salvation of our God’.

All these readings are wonderful encouragement and share a marvellous insight: people began to change when they are encouraged to see the best of themselves. Simply to tell people what is wrong with them and leave it at that can be to leave them a wreck. It’s like leaving the scene of an accident.



And people rarely change when they are left to themselves, enclosed in their own weakness, starting at their own mistakes. That's a lonely project precisely because there is no one to care whether change takes place or not.

We all need help and encouragement to leave behind familiar ways which have become destructive. We need help in imagining ourselves differently, and imagining the good effect that we will have on others. We have to take time to reflect what kind of person God wants us to be, what God's plan is for us. We need faith in the future, to see the power of God working in the change. To have Paul's certainty that God will not abandon us in our efforts, but 'that the One who began this good work in you will see that it is finished'.

In all this we need each other's help and encouragement. To change we need others prodding us on: 'Go. You can do it.' We need to call out the best in each other like Paul does with his converts, and rejoice with the people in the changes they have made for the better. After all, Paul himself had to make big changes in his life, and it was the Philippians who gave **him** encouragement in his big change by accepting him as an apostle of the Lord.

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If our Chaplaincy and community is to be constantly converted to the Lord, we all have to breathe in encouragement in a simple, practical way. That will be a change for the better.

As St John Henry Newman reminds us – *‘To be human is to change.*

To be perfect is to have changed often’.

And so let us deal with each other with Grace and love, and let peace rule in our hearts – in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Amen