

ADVENT 2: LISTEN!

Mark 1:1-8 [MW17-38]

Sermon preached by Rev Wayne Thornton at Mangawhai and Wellsford, Sunday 10 December 2017

Christmas is a time of surprises. There was a lady who was preparing her Christmas cookies. There was a knock at the door. She went to find a man, his clothes poor, obviously looking for some Christmas odd jobs. He asked her if there was anything he could do.

She said, "Can you paint?"

"Yes," he said. "I'm a rather good painter."

"Well," she said, "there are two gallons of green paint there and a brush, and there's a porch out back that needs to be painted. Please do a good job. I'll pay you what the job is worth."

He said, "Fine. I'll be done quickly."

She went back to her cookie making and didn't think much more about it until there was a knock at the door. She went, and the obviousness of his painting was evident: he had it on his clothes.

She said, "Did you finish the job?"

He said, "Yes."

She said, "Did you do a good job?"

He said, "Yes. But lady, there's one thing I'd like to point out to you. That's not a Porsche back there. That's a Mercedes."

People missed the arrival of Jesus, that is, his birth

- it was obscure
- out of the way, unexpected
- it wasn't so much that people deliberately ignored it
- more that they didn't notice
- and overlooked it

However God is gracious and gives people a second chance

- this time it was much more difficult to overlook
- maybe even impossible to ignore
- as John the Baptist prepared the way

In the Old Testament God's prophets are speaking and acting and rebuking

- left, right and centre ... all over the place
- it was hard not to be aware of what God thought
- that God had a plan, that God was communicating with his people
- what God said wasn't always what people wanted to hear
- but there was no doubting God was around and involved
- or was sitting in judgement

Of course at the end of the "Old Testament period" God was still doing all those things

- but it didn't seem to be remembered and recorded the same way
- there seems to be a kind of "lull" in the story of God's people
- almost as if it was "intermission" or "half-time"
- no one was changing ends
- but it did seem as if God was going to do something new
- something very, very different

And to announce this new very, very different thing

- God stirred John the Baptist to prepare people to get them ready for what was to come

It's interesting that Mark's Gospel has no "birth narrative"

- no story of an announcement to Mary
no record of the birth of a special baby
- Mark starts with the bold, in your face announcement:
This is the good news about Jesus Christ, the Son of God

There's no doubt about it

- it's not okay news
it's not alright news
- it is the good news: THE Good News!

It begins with a statement of the words of the prophet Isaiah

- words that were our first Bible reading this morning
loosely translated these words mean:
"Listen up! Look out! Get ready!"
- though to do them justice, to give them the same import and feeling
Mark was trying to convey about John the Baptist
- I would need to look a lot less tidy
speak much more gruffly ...
- and a whole heap LOUDER!

I really like the way the CEV puts it

- right after quoting Isaiah it says: "So John the Baptist showed up ..."
so John the Baptist showed up
- kind of like one day he wasn't there
and the next day he was
- one day the universe is happening along as usual
the next day the whole of reality is different

People must have been ready

- otherwise they would not have responded as they did
I mean what exactly did John the Baptist say?
- were John's nice comforting words?
all politically correct?
inclusive, warm and welcoming?
- what did he say?
(space)

It was nothing if not inclusive!

- *Turn back to God and be baptized! Then your sins will be forgiven*
- and people did! people did!
Crowds. Hordes. Doves
- so many it was all John could do to baptise them all

People were getting ready – but not for John the Baptist

- John the Baptist was not it, and he made sure people knew this
John was not the ‘main event’
- John the Baptist was the sign that God was doing something new
something very, very different
- and different as he himself was
John made it abundantly clear that this very new, very different thing
was coming, soon, and he was pointing the way
- John was to tell people God was on the move and to get ready

The real action comes next: The star in this drama, to whom I'm a mere stagehand, will change your life. I'm baptizing you here in the river, turning your old life in for a kingdom life. His baptism - a holy baptism by the Holy Spirit - will change you from the inside out.

John the Baptist is the link between the Old and the New Testaments

- the link between what God had done and the way God had acted in the past
and what God was beginning to do and how God would act in the future

John the Baptist's message was loud and clear:

- you didn't really have to listen too hard – it came at you like a foghorn:
People get ready!

People get ready

- to help us reflect on that message for us today
first a dialogue
and then a song ...

* Dialogue: “Something is Going to Happen?”

That's kind of it in a nutshell

- something is about to happen
after a long period of well, not exactly nothing – but perhaps quiet
- something is about to happen
something very, very different

That's the message of God:

- last week we were instructed to “Watch!”
this week we are to continue to be on lookout
and “Listen !”
- listen for voice of John the Baptist relaying the message of our God:
I'm about to do something
so you better get ready!

* I invite you to listen, reflect, imagine

- as the Blind Boys of Alabama sing the classic, “People Get Ready”
[Video clip: “People Get Ready” and hand out lyrics]

Something Different is Going to Happen?

Characters: Librarian 1 [L1], Librarian 2 [L2], Visitor [V]

Introduction:

Imagine two official librarians responsible for looking after all the original copies of the scrolls containing the sacred history of God's people. The scrolls of the history, scrolls of Psalms, scrolls of the words of the prophets ... Of course there is no such library and no such librarians. But if there were, there might have been an exchange along these lines ... picture a vast room filled with shelves and shelves of scrolls. A dusty, musty smell. In front of the shelves is a desk with two chairs behind it. The two librarians are near the desk, talking.

L1: God's been awfully quiet lately.

L2: Lately? Lately! Has any scroll been added to the Sacred Library since you've been working here? Has any scroll been added since you were born even?

L1: (scratches head, stares into space) Um. No.

L2: Anything been added since Malachi?

L1: (checks list on the desk) Now that you mention it ... no.

L2: Malachi was ages and ages and ages ago; and since then ...

L1: ...nothing.

L2: Zip.

L1: Zero.

L2: Nada.

L1: Kind of like one of those stories where it's all left up in the air.

L2: More like one where it's left open for the next installment ... only ...

L1: There is no next installment.

L2: So do you think he's asleep?

L1: Who?

L2: The Lord.

L1: No! Of course not. You know yourself it says in Psalm 121, verse 6: "The Lord neither slumbers nor sleeps".

L2: Oh, right. So do you think he's forgotten then?

L1: Look you know this stuff very well. Psalm 65 says God will never forget his people.

L2: (sheepish) Of course. But it has been an awfully long time. Now I'm sure God's got a plan. It's just ...

L1: ... we haven't heard from him ...

L2: ... in a long time.

L1: Here we are, all ready to record and catalogue the words of the Lord God as spoken through his prophet ...

L2: That's just the point isn't it. There hasn't been a prophet, someone telling us the thoughts and plans of the Lord God ...

L1: For so long ...

L2: We can't remember ...

L1: Unless we missed something?

L2: I don't think so?

(L1 and L2 seem to be thinking, reminiscing, trying to recall)

Suddenly a visitor bursts in, all excited

V: Guys! Guys! You've gotta see this. In the desert. Down by the river.
The Jordan that is.

L1 and L2 together: What?!

V: You've just gotta see this! Come on! Hurry!

L1: (to L2) You go. We can't both leave. Someone has to mind the scrolls.

L2: Let's both go. Grab a heap of blank scrolls and some pens. This could be it.

L1: Could be what?

L2: It! What we've been waiting for. Hurry up. Get the gear and let's go!
This could be just what we've been waiting for!

L1: What? How? Why?

L2: Precisely. Come on. We have to go. Something is about to happen!

L1: Something is about to happen?

L2: Oh yes! (L2 pushes L1 ahead of him as they exit)

People get ready, there's a train a-coming
You don't need no baggage, you just get on board
All you need is faith to hear the diesels humming
Don't need no ticket, you just thank the Lord

People get ready for the train to Jordan
Picking up passengers from coast to coast
Faith is the key, open up the doors and board them
There's hope for all among the loved the most

There ain't no room for the hopeless sinner
Who would hurt all mankind just to save his own
Have pity on those whose chances grow thinner
'Cause there's no hiding place from the Kingdom's Throne

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I believe, I believe, I believe oh I believe ...



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