

Theme: Who are you and are you ready for Jesus? Third Sunday of Advent 2020 - John 1: 6-8, 19-28& Isaiah 61:1-4 8-end

May I speak in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit
Amen, please sit down.

Regularly on TV there is a programme called “Who do you think you are?”, where celebrities have their family trees traced, it seems somewhere inside us is the need to find out where we came from and for others to know too.

For the last goodness knows how many years I have been researching my family tree, it's very addictive so I don't do it very often as once I have started, it's difficult to put down. So far, I have got back to 1220. The most interesting ancestor I can claim fame to so far is Archbishop Thomas Cranmer (he of the prayer book and burning to the stake fame) in my family line, my great great great x lots of greats grandfather was his brother. Everyone else in my tree seems to be farmers, traders or similar. It's strange that, as I am the last of the Cranmer line, my father, and I, both had no brothers, that this family line through the males has now died out, with the passing of my father in July this year.

If someone were to ask, “Who are you?” how would you answer that? You may describe your relationship status, what you do for a living, and even your interests. There are the obvious answers: Such as a parent, a sibling, a carer, a worker, a manager, perhaps you may even say A Christian, a follower of Jesus,

But is this who you really are? Isn't there much more to what makes you... you? The problem is, if you don't know who you really are, you may sell yourself short on what you are really on this earth for. When we realize that we were created in God's image, and through Him, our identity and our purpose are all connected, it changes everything.

In today's gospel people are asking who John is. John appeared on the scene, looking, eating, and acting differently to the norm. It's likely that he was brought up by the Essene religious community based near the Dead Sea, and he was Jesus's cousin, on his mother, Mary's, side. We know nothing of his early life, except he was born to elderly parents, so probably orphaned, hence possibly growing up in the Essene community. He based himself in Bethany, in Jordan, where he baptised and people were asking him who he was and where he was from, we read:
He..... confessed freely, “I am not the Messiah.”
They asked him, “Then who are you? Are you Elijah?”
He said, “I am not.”
“Are you the Prophet?”

He answered, "No."

Finally, they said, "Who are you? Give us an answer to take back to those who sent us. What do you say about yourself?"

John replied in the words of Isaiah the prophet, "I am the voice of one calling in the wilderness, 'Make straight the way for the Lord.'"

John's role was to prepare people for Jesus, in a similar way that we are currently in the season of advent, the season for preparation to make us spiritually ready for the coming of Jesus.

It's quite apt, I think, here in a COVID-19, mask wearing, distance keeping, controlled 2020, to hear John saying he is the voice of one crying in the wilderness. I don't know about you, but that's sort of how this year has felt for me, wandering around, not sure of a direction, not sure what will happen next 'crying in the wilderness'. But John makes it clear, Jesus is coming, and on Christmas Day, we celebrate this fact.

And now there are less than 2 weeks until Christmas!

Are you ready for Christmas? That is another question we hear quite often these days, isn't it? What do people mean when they ask if you are ready for Christmas? Well, they usually mean things like...

Do you have all of your shopping done?

Have you finished wrapping all your gifts?

Have you put up your Christmas tree and all the decorations?

Have you sent your Christmas cards?

Are you ready for Christmas?

There is another question that is much more important than this. That question is, "Are you ready for Jesus"

John wanted the people to get ready for the coming of the Messiah. What he really meant was that the people needed to get their hearts right and return to God. You see, no matter how good people may think they are, there are always some crooked ways and rough places in their lives. There are things such as dishonesty, selfishness, pride, jealousy, and many more. John wanted the people to make those crooked ways straight and rough places smooth so that Jesus could come and walk among them.

Today we are halfway through advent, which is a time of preparation and waiting. But waiting for what? For Christmas, yes. But Advent is also the time in the church year when we think about another kind of waiting for Jesus – waiting for Jesus to come again, as he has promised he will.

During this special season of the year, you and I need to make sure that we are ready. We need to look into our hearts and ask God to help us to make

our crooked ways straight and smooth out the rough places so that we can walk with Jesus each day of our life. Jesus doesn't mind about our rough and crooked places, but wouldn't it be lovely to come to him confident in our faith.

Are you ready for Christmas? Are you ready for Jesus”?

If you don't believe that Jesus will return then it doesn't matter what you do, but if you do believe that Jesus will come again then we need to examine ourselves.

Advent is the season of the church year when we consider how we are actively waiting for the return of Jesus. This is a good time to ask ourselves questions like:

- How seriously have I taken the fact that Jesus died and rose for me?
- Have I become disinterested and distant from God and his church?
- Have I just done what pleases me or followed the crowd?
- Have I been constant in my daily prayers or do I just say a prayer every now and then when I think of it?
- Have I been going about my life without any reference to God or giving any thought to his presence?

As we consider these questions today let's remember that we are Christians and so we will stand confidently and tall so that when we get asked 'are you ready for Christmas?' Or 'who are you?'

We can confidently and honestly affirm our Christian faith.

Amen