

Sunday Thought

5th December 2021 Second Sunday of Advent

Readings

Malachi 3: 1 - 4

Canticle – Luke 1:68 - 79

Philippians 1: 3 - 11

Luke 3: 1 - 6

Deep Clean

When Luke wrote his account of Jesus for Theophilus we assume he also had in mind a universal readership. It was probably meant to be read in Christian house groups or wherever followers of Jesus met together. In the six verses of today's reading he sets the stage for his story. It all happens in the Jordan valley from Mount Hermon in the north to the Dead Sea in the south. He makes clear the political and geographical setting for those who did not know the land, telling how the area is under occupation by Rome with much rivalry and intrigue between rulers and families. He mentions too the similar problems in the religious scene, under High Priests Anna and Caiaphas, where true faith is obscured behind curtains of ritual and legalism. Readers would assume implications of rebel forces in the hills and religious revivalists in the deserts.



So, Luke's story begins, '*At that time!* And what a time! The world was ready for Jesus! State and Religion, rulers and people were in need of great change in every part of their life. John's ministry took him the whole length of the Jordan valley to reach across all the lives and interests of contemporary society. It was the same course Jesus would follow during his three years of ministry, for John was the forerunner of the Messiah, foretold by prophets. Our reading from Malachi is one of those Messianic prophecies. God knows about political and social corruption. He knows that much religious life is false. His people are being led astray and divorced from him, but he promises he will send a Saviour. A messenger will precede that deliverer, preparing the way to restore their relationship with God. It will presage a day of judgement which will be like a ripping up of lands to make a new highway and a '*Deep Clean*' of both spiritual and national life.

We know that Jesus and John were family, related through Mary and Elizabeth – possibly cousins. I like to think of them meeting together when the families attended festivals in Jerusalem, and later maybe in the religious communities of the desert. Perhaps they conferred about their divine vocations and message. We learn that John did not grasp all of Jesus's purpose, but initially their message was the same. It was for all people – *Repent! Turn back to God and his ways!* to see a restoration of faith and nation.

The same message was at the heart of the first churches' teaching. That is clear from Paul's prayer for the congregation at Philippi in the reading today. The church at Philippi was known for its loving, caring fellowship and Paul prays for that to continue and grow stronger. He longs *'from the very heart of Christ'*, that those who have responded to the privilege of believing in Jesus as their living saviour, will let nothing get in the way of sharing his grace among themselves and in their community. Then they will see the church constantly revived to expand further as a world-changing force. At the heart of it all is the witness of their pure, loving lives – their Christlikeness – *'being filled with all the goodness only Jesus can give'*, to them, their community, and the wider world. Ultimately, they will live as those who are ready for the final day of judgement when Christ comes again, and all creation will see and share the glory of God.

Reflecting on that I saw again how our world today is in a similar situation to John's. I mused on the turmoil of people and nations, the agonies of human suffering, human-made national and global disasters, and often misguided and ineffective religious life. The message we need to hear, and share is still unchanged. *'Repent! Turn back to God and his rules for life and living. Let God give you a deep clean of life in yourself, your church, your community, your nation, your world.'* It is what Jesus preached. It is what he lived and died to make real.

What a day! What a challenge! To lead the way as the people of God, letting him renovate our lives until the church overflows with his love and calls the world to a Deep Clean – starting with our own doorstep!

A Prayer (Thinking of Zecharah's Song of praise for the gift of his son
and the dawning of a new day for all people)

We praise the Lord, our God! He comes to help his people and set them free.
We have a mighty Saviour – Jesus who lived, died, and rose again for us.

Lord, we will serve you fearlessly:
We want you to make us holy all our days.
Deep clean our lives by your Spirit in us.
Let that be like a new dawn,
dispersing life's shadows,
guiding us in ways of peace, love, and truth,
ready for the day of your coming
when we shall see and share your glory

