

10am St Thomas – Advent 3

I'm a terrible gardener, but this analogy is the best for us this morning. It helps that so many of you are gifted and joyful gardeners, but also Haydon and I didn't think me eating locusts and wild honey from the pulpit would send any useful message.

Imagine A beautiful flower in your garden being strangled by weeds. Or we can just use this one. The weeds block the sun. The roots of the weeds steal the flower's water, And the flower shrivels and eventually dies if we don't help it.

That's how sin works in our lives, I know that you all know this. if we allow it to flourish unchecked it blocks out God. It distracts us or causes us to hide. We become so complicated inside that God doesn't get a look in and we can't see the light in the darkness.

But when We follow John's call to prepare the way of the Lord, We are called to forgive, even when we don't want to – cut some bramble....and we confess to God in honesty, in truth, those things that we have done against love or not done instead of trying to hide in our own self-righteousness, those things that may be buried deep and that we deny, and we bring them to light. And then we do the hard thing and ask for forgiveness from other people who we have hurt even if it was inadvertent.

When we seek the humility that John expressed, I am not the one. We are not the one...Jesus is the one...It's about God's will, not my own.

And when we remove these weeds we can see God in our midst. And when we remove the roots of the weeds God feeds us such that we grow in grace, in love, in peace.

Advent is a time of preparing the way of the Lord, it's the time when we allow John the Baptist into our midst to help us pull the weeds in our own hearts, in the heart of the church, in the heart of our society, in the heart of our world. And when we do this, we see Christmas, Emmanuel comes into our lives just like that first time,

Of course there is sin on a large scale, a Gaza shaped scale, an Erez, Nirim, Netivot, Sufa shaped scale, a Ukraine shaped scale an airplane destined to Rwanda shaped scale and so much more. We can allow this darkness to blot out the light God is sending into the world just like the weeds and the flower. We can allow this darkness to take away our hope, to blind us to his light.

I cannot help but going back to Jane's reflection a couple weeks ago. I know I shared it at evensong last week, but I want us each to really hear this in our hearts. She quoted Ettie Hilsum who was a Dutch Jewish author of confessional letters and diaries which

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describe both her religious awakening and the persecutions of Jewish people in Amsterdam during the German occupation. In 1943, she was deported and murdered at Auschwitz. Her work is profound. She answers the question, Why is there war

‘...Because I and my neighbour and everyone else do not have enough love. Yet we could fight war and all its excrescences by releasing, each day, the love that is shackled inside us, and giving it a chance to live....’

‘Ultimately, we have just one moral duty: to reclaim large areas of peace in ourselves, more and more peace, and to reflect it towards others. And the more peace there is in us, the more peace there will also be in our troubled world.’

John baptised with water – did you know that all the water there will ever be in our world is here now. Nothing makes more water. The molecules combine and reconfigure from vapor to rain, but always move back to water on earth as rivers, streams, sea or even part of each one of us. Peace is different, love is different. As Ettie Hilsum wrote, There is infinite potential for more and more peace in our world, more and more love. Unlike water it is not limited, more peace, more love as we allow The Holy Spirit to tend the gardens of our hearts and allow these to flow from us. If we can prepare the way for Christ to fill us with his spirit. If we can

remember our own baptism in Christ, a baptism of the spirit....
we... live... love

John is crying in the wilderness. We live in a wilderness. We are looking at a broken world which entertains the atrocities of war, a broken society which encourages division over unity, a broken community where children don't always get enough to eat. But God has a plan and we are part of it. We can bemoan the brokenness...or....Or ask God to remove the weeds, follow John's Advent cry, we can allow peace in our hearts, we can make a way for love to flow from us out into this wilderness world, we can make a difference; it's the only difference we are given to make.

Isaiah wrote that

The Lord's anointed is coming

to bring good news to the oppressed,

to bind up the brokenhearted,

to proclaim liberty to the captives

and release to the prisoners,

to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour

to comfort all who mourn,

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Which one of these do you long for in your life, in the world, this Christmas?

Then we must head the Baptists call

I am a child of the 60s and 70s. Yes, I hear Handel's Messiah when we read John's familiar words, but I hear Godspell first.....Prepare ye the way of the lord, prepare ye the way of the lord

Join me

Come Emmanuel. Amen