

Advent 3 C 2021 LSM

Phil 4:4-7; Luke 3:7-18

On this the third Sunday of Advent we finally come to John the Baptist himself- the wild man from the wilderness, (dressed in animal skins, eating locusts and honey) preaching wrath and destruction for everyone who does not follow God's Holy Law . He seems to strike a chord with the general population and some unexpected people come to ask what they should do to be saved:

For example tax collectors who were well known for demanding more than was required by the Empire, and getting rich on the difference.

Soldiers – probably Temple soldiers rather than Roman soldiers- were known for using their position and uniformed status to threaten and bully.

But **who is the obvious target of the wrath** that will ultimately bring about his execution? Herod, the local governor; who has apparently broken every one of the 10 commandments at least once and probably many more times.

Roman rule was brutal, but kept the peace in a region of the world that is to this day not exactly restful. Herod was a local official prepared to enforce Roman regulations while enjoying a lavish

lifestyle at the expense of his own people, the Jews.¹⁹ The next 2 verses after our reading tell us

But when John rebuked Herod the tetrarch because of his marriage to Herodias, his brother's wife, and all the other evil things he had done,²⁰ Herod added this to them all: He locked John up in prison.

But John is not only haranguing the general public about their shocking lapses in behaviour (when, as God's' chosen people they really should know better), he is also prophesying that a person **much more important than he is about to enter the public arena**, someone whose shoelaces he is not fit to untie.

An unlikely comparison perhaps but think about this for a moment: **who IS deemed fit to put on or take off the shoes of a very important person?** It's such a personal thing to do and, just as Jesus at the Last Supper kneeling in front of his disciples and washing their feet, a very humble, self effacing service to offer.

The first time I, as an adult, had my feet washed by someone else, I felt incredibly embarrassed. How would you feel? Embarrassed, honoured, cared for, loved, given the respect you were due? I wonder.

Paul in our first reading is writing to a new congregation in a solidly Roman city. The whole Roman world was at peace, albeit under

strong and often brutal rule. Modern equivalents could include Saddam Hussein in Afghanistan and Gaddafi in Libya. Harsh regimes that forbade any alternative ideas, any form of rebellion squashed violently although the majority went about their daily business in peace.

However, not the sort of peaceful kingdom John and Paul are both talking about.

Paul's first sentence is itself a challenge "**rejoice in the Lord**".

In the Roman Empire the only Lord was Caesar and the only rejoicing allowed was on Roman festivals and Caesar's birthday. So Paul, like John, is attacking the establishment – a dangerous activity.

Are we, you and I, prepared to challenge authority behaving in an unethical or (ever so slightly) illegal way? Do we have the nerve to even challenge the co-worker who pockets office pens and paper? It's a lot easier to turn away, to move on, pretend we don't see or understand - but is that right? Is that what Jesus, or John, or Paul did?

Ok, probably none of us sees ourselves as a John or a Paul, but all three have left us clear guidelines on behaviour.

Back to our Luke reading:- the average person is instructed to share whatever they have with those who have nothing or less than them.

The tax collector is told to stop cheating and profiteering and only take the correct tax.

The soldier is told to treat everyone fairly and not to use his position to intimidate and bully others.

Perhaps we all know someone who behaves in a less than honest way whether that is someone in our own circle or someone in a position of authority. . Can we, seeing that behaviour, risk our own status to challenge them?

To quote Paul again "in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. ⁷ And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.