

*the forerunner*  
a sermon preached on the  
*3<sup>rd</sup> sunday of advent*  
14 December 2014  
at  
*st john's*  
ANGLICAN CHURCH CAMBERWELL  
*by fr david moore, vicar*

the lections: Isaiah 64:1-4,8-11; Psalm 126; 1 Thessalonians 5:12-28; John 1:6-8,19-28

If you seek a heavenly light,  
I, Solitude, am your professor!

I go before you into emptiness,  
Raise strange suns for your new mornings,  
Open the secret windows  
Of your innermost apartment.

When, I, loneliness, give my special signal  
Follow my silence, follow where I beckon:  
Fear not, little beast, little spirit,  
(Thou word & animal)  
I, Solitude, am Angel  
And have prayed in your name.

Look at the empty, wealthy night  
The pilgrim moon!  
I am the appointed hour,  
The 'now' that cuts  
Time like a blade.

I am the unexpected flash  
Beyond 'yes' and 'no,'  
The forerunner of the Word of God.

Follow my ways and I will lead you  
To golden-haired suns,  
Logos and music, blameless joys,  
Innocent of questions  
And beyond answers.  
For I, Solitude, am thine own Self:  
I, Nothingness, am Thy All.  
I, Silence, am thy 'Amen.'

The monk and spiritual teacher Thomas Merton paints for us a picture of the 'forerunner of the Word of God'. John the Baptist is known in Christian tradition as the 'forerunner'. John appears in the wilderness, we are told – out of solitude, emptiness, loneliness, silence. John is 'sent from God'<sup>1</sup> at 'the appointed hour'. His appearing is the 'now' that 'cuts Time like a blade'. For those who seek the 'heavenly light', which is the Word made Flesh, the solitude of John is our 'professor' – "testifying to the light" our hearts truly desire.<sup>2</sup>

The status quo does not welcome John. They send a delegation to interrogate him as to his credentials: "Let us have an answer... what do you say about yourself? Why are you baptising?"<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> John 1:6  
<sup>2</sup> John 1:7  
<sup>3</sup> John 1:22, 25

Because the religious leaders' attention is mis-directed, they remain ignorant, unconscious, in the darkness – unable to apprehend the light to which John testifies. John's diagnosis of their spiritual condition is direct, and devastating: "Among you stands one whom you do not know".<sup>4</sup>

Advent Three's task is to be attentive to the voice of the Forerunner of the Word of God – the 'now that cuts like a blade' in every corner of the world – so that we may recognise the One to whom he testifies, the One already among us.

The necessary attention is both an interior work of the soul – and an external work of collaboration in ongoing creation. Many observers note that humankind, and the planet itself, are approaching a critical point. The development of human consciousness in this millennium – and the very life of the planet itself – is requiring radical transformation of our misuse of the planet's resources; radical transformation of our addiction to consumption and materialism; radical transformation of the underlying economic systems which are unable to solve structural injustice and inequity; as well as radical transformation of our narrow attitudes to the concept of the nation state, in light of the 51 million 'forcibly displaced persons' in the world right now.<sup>5</sup>

The Forerunner of the Word of God is telling us that there is One already standing among us - in whom the necessary radical transformations of the human potential is accomplished, in whom is life.<sup>6</sup>

Advent Three's call is for a space sufficient for the One who is already among us. It's a call to seek the eternal 'heavenly light', to risk the necessary emptiness – the silence, the solitude, the 'appointed hour which will cut our Time like a blade', the transcending of our narrow selves, to discover beyond the duality of 'yes' and 'no' the life which is 'the light of all people'.

Again, such a spiritual condition is both an inner work of the soul – as well as an outer work requiring concrete political, economic and thoroughly practical action.

The gospel assures us that there *is* One who is already among us – who enables us to transcend our 'yes' and our 'no'; bringing good news to the oppressed; binding up the brokenhearted; proclaiming liberty to captives; release to prisoners; proclaiming the year of the Lord's favour.<sup>7</sup> The One who is Nothing in the eyes of the powerful turns out to be our All – the light by which Love transforms all things.

In these remaining Advent days let us attend ever more deeply to the One who is already among us – yet who is coming - in whose light of love everything that requires transcending is being accomplished.

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<sup>4</sup> John 1:26

<sup>5</sup> 'Facts and Figures about Refugees', UNHCR, <http://www.unhcr.org/about-us/key-facts-and-figures.html>

<sup>6</sup> John 1:4

<sup>7</sup> Isaiah 61:1-2