



Advent #3

Hold on, God will do it

w/c 17 December 2023

"Everybody talks of changing humanity, and nobody thinks of changing himself (sic)." (Leo Tolstoy)

Read Luke 3:7–18

John's message is all about change for his audience, their becoming new versions of themselves. This is not simply an intellectual exercise, but one which involves our entire being. John Donne put it this way:

*"Batter my heart, three-person'd God, for you
As yet but knock, breathe, shine, and seek to mend;
That I may rise and stand, o'erthrow me, and bend
Your force to break, blow, burn, and make me new."*

However, we should remember as well, as Romans 12 makes clear, that this change does of course affect not just our heart but our intellect as well. What is it that we are being made new for?

Our reading this week forms part of Luke's parallel passage to the one in Mark we looked at last week. For our lives today, perhaps verse 16 is the most significant. Throughout the Old Testament era, God's direct presence (*Ruach Adonai*) in believers had been something specific to an individual and limited in time. The Hebrew term *Ruach* can equally mean breath, wind or spirit; *Adonai* is the term for God that we translate as Lord. The Greek, *pneuma*, carries exactly the same three-fold meaning as *ruach*.

Jeremiah (31:31ff) had though already spelled out the nature of God's new covenant – *"they will all know me"*. Jesus, speaking to his disciples after the last supper was even more detailed: his words recorded in John 14:16&23 between them promise the permanent presence with us of all three members of the Trinity. It is worth recalling some words from the Athanasian Creed – *"we worship one God in Trinity, and Trinity in Unity"* or, to paraphrase a famous song, you can't have one without the other(s). How can we show this indwelling of our triune God in our everyday life?

It has been said that the true culmination of Advent is Easter rather than ending at Christmas. George MacLeod (founder of the Iona Community) described how he saw the impact that such faith should have on our lives:

"The cross must be raised again at the centre of the marketplace as well as on the steeple of the church. I am claiming that Jesus was not crucified in a cathedral between two candles, but on a cross between two thieves; on the town garbage heap, at a crossroads so cosmopolitan they had the write His title in Hebrew, Latin and Greek. At the kind of place where cynics talk smut, and thieves curse, and soldiers gamble, because that is where He died and that is what he died about and that is where churchmen (sic) ought to be and what churchmen should be about."

How can we make this a season of going out, rather than just expecting others to come to us?

I came upon some words written nearly thirty years ago by Bishop John Finney (from *Recovering the past – Celtic and Roman mission*) as he considered how we could best reach a postmodern society. I hope this might help us understand an approach that is increasingly vital. What do you think?

"...evangelism goes where people are and listens, binds together prayer and truth, celebrates the goodness and complexity of life as well as judging the sinfulness of evil, and sees truth as something to be done and experienced as well as to be intellectually believed. It walks in humility."

Finally, read 1 Thessalonians 5:16–24 by yourself later and reflect on the promises for you that it contains.