

2020-12-06 ... 10am Sermon and Video Reflection ... Revd Canon Judy Hunt  
Isaiah 40: 1-11; Mark 1: 18  
'Advent Wilderness'

Here are some memorable first lines from books or films, can anyone guess where they come from?

'All children, except one, grow up.' (*Peter Pan* by JM Barrie)

'Call me Ishmael.' (*Moby-Dick* by Herman Melville)

'It was the best of times, it was the worst of times...' (*A Tale of Two Cities* by Charles Dickens)

'A long time ago in a galaxy far, far away...' (*Star Wars IV: A New Hope*)

'Mr and Mrs Dursley of number four, Privet Drive, were proud to say that they were perfectly normal, thank you very much.' (*Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone* by JK Rowling)

'The beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ...' (Mark's Gospel). These are the opening words of what is reckoned to be the earliest account of the life and death of Jesus and in this Gospel, this account of Good News – we start in the wilderness ...

"A wilderness experience"

People usually, I think, use this phrase to describe a difficult period: Feeling uncertain, feeling lost, feeling that the usual markers in life have gone ...

"A wilderness experience"

Biblically, this is one association of 'wilderness' – but it's not the only one. Some of us looked at Paula Gooder's study guide about this recently: "**A way through the wilderness**" – based on Isaiah 40 – some of which is in our OT reading today..

And as some of us and some of our family and friends may well be feeling that these times of Covid-19 are forcing a "wilderness experience" on us, I'm going to revisit a couple of things from that study guide.

Its sub-title is: "**Experiencing God's help in times of Crisis**" – now that can immediately change our mood, our expectation.

In today's passage from Isaiah, God is speaking to the Israelites who are in Babylon – those who are in exile ... and God is assuring them that he has a future for them – a future with comfort, hope and joy.

But for this – as at the beginning of Mark's gospel about Jesus, they need to step out into the wilderness – and then they will encounter God in the wilderness – receive his comfort, become channels of that comfort for others and then – as Isaiah Chapter 40 continues – they will also receive strength for their weariness.

Viewed in this way – the wilderness offers promise. .So if we are experiencing these weeks and months as a "wilderness time" – that does not have to be completely negative. Maybe now is the time to turn from negativity to expectation –each of us is offered an encounter with God during this Advent. **God says to each of us:**

"Receive my comfort, my joy, my strength".

"Look out for my presence in these coming days"

"Discover for whom you can be my messenger"

"Let me gather you gently in my arms and nurture you with good things."