

Advent 3

In Zephaniah we hear the promises made to God's own people. The power promises of a strong and resolute ruler that then move on to be the promises we are more used to hearing from Jesus in the gospels – those of love and compassion from a caring and protective ruler.

Contrast these with the statements and demands of John. He sees his task as one of urgency, and one that requires effort in order to prepare for the important One who is to come.

It is interesting, too, that in an age when we are used to people making themselves out to be more important than they are – claiming more and more influence for themselves, putting themselves at the centre of events, that here we have John emphatically denying: **“No I am not He’ ...** here he demonstrates the real awareness not only of his own task and his importance, but of how it relates to Jesus **“the one who is to come.”**

John knows, as we all do, the importance of preparation. It can make the difference between success and failure. If you are to do a job you first need to prepare for it. The necessary items need to be assembled, the task needs to be considered, thought through and only then begun and worked at until completed.

I sometimes fancy baking something, but, if when I check my cupboards I don't have the right ingredients I can't do it: I either have to rethink and do something different or wait until I can assemble all that I needed.

This is what John is doing, he is making sure that the time is right for Jesus to begin His task by having prepared things. John's washing clean of sins is not just a precursor of Jesus' baptising with the Spirit but is a preparation for the hearing of Jesus' message.

Acknowledging past wrongdoings and mistakes is of course the first step in self-knowledge and readiness to change. The cleansing effect makes way for the ability to hear and learn God's truth, to allow his love to move in and fill that space created. This is what John does, his work leads on to what Jesus comes to do and builds on the prophecies of Isaiah, linking both his role as forerunner and leading on to the promise of what is to come both in the advent of Jesus and of what he is promising for the future.

Those who came to him were people made unhappy by the materialism and hypocrisy of their world, by the unbelief and secularism and those who wished to see their Roman rulers thrown out.

Mostly they were drawn to him because he called them to be a people of hope. Like them we too can respond to that call: **“Make way for the Lord who comes”**. So during this Advent, as we prepare for the coming of the Christ Child, we pray for the renewal of the Spirit in us and our lives. Week by week the Advent ring shows that the Light of the World gets closer as we light each candle and the light grows brighter.

Amen.