

*It's time!*

St Philip's Anglican Church, O'Connor  
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*Malachi 3: 1-14; Song of Zechariah (APBA p.30 or 425); Philippians 1: 1-11; Luke 3:1-16*

This week contains light and hope and joy. People in a [ ] political party were joyful.

"It's time!" Rob, our rector, still has his badge!

It's time for a change.

This week has certainly been a time of change for the Labor Party. As it was a time of change 30 years ago.

What ever we might think about it whether it was a good or bad thing there was change in our land with a Labor government with Whitlam.

And now Whitlam is reported as saying that now he can die a happy man because his protégée, Mark Latham, has been elected leader of his party.

Are we not reminded of Simeon the old man at the temple?

And his words, "now Lord you have kept your promise, and you may let your servant go in peace."

When we hear the words 'it's time' Are we not reminded of the words of Malachi written 2,500 years ago, "The messenger of the covenant, in whom you delight indeed he is coming, ...But who can endure the day of his coming, and who can stand when he appears?" and in today's Gospel when John quotes the prophet Isaiah:

"Someone is shouting in the desert,  
Get the road ready for the Lord  
Make a straight path for him to travel!  
Every valley must be filled up every hill and mountain levelled off.  
The winding roads must be made straight  
and the rough paths made smooth.  
The whole human race will see God's salvation."

Next week we hear how crowds of people came out to hear John and be baptised. And John turns on them, questions their motives, and calls them names as severe as any the new leader of Labor has called other members of the house, and the most powerful man in the world, the President of the United States.

John the Baptist's call is all about change, now not later, but now.

It's all about not waiting anymore,  
it's all about repenting,  
that is, turning around,  
owning up to what we have been doing wrong, to our short comings, and to stop doing what we know is wrong for us, getting baptised and changing now.

Its all about time being of the essence.

'There is a time for every season under the sun.'

And the time for change is now. This is what Advent is about.

It's about pausing, stopping,  
To think about what our lives are like,  
what they should be like  
and what we have to do to make them how they should be.

In a little book I have of quotations I found one which is right for now but I thought two for Rob to find a place for in the paper was enough. It goes like this:

'You can't build a reputation on what you are going to do.' Henry Ford.

I identify strongly with that.

I never get it right for the weeks before Christmas.

I haven't sent the cards, bought the presents, worked out exactly how the family is meeting on Christmas day.

And as Rob will know it's worse when you are clergy because you have to work on Christmas Eve and Day.

Still, I have an awful feeling that the way we prepare for Christmas can be a clue to how well we prepare for living each day of our lives so that we are open to the overflowing of God's blessing promised by Malachi.

Today we recall a time when the word of God, or a message from God came to John in the desert.

And what did he do?

John did not simply stay in the desert as a hermit, smugly glad that God had spoken to him personally,

No he went all through the country around the Jordan River preaching a baptism of life change as Eugene Peterson translates it,

Life change leading to forgiveness of sins.

John spoke with authority using the known words of the prophets:

Known words said again to remind people of how they should be and what they should do.

How they should change to bring about change in themselves and in the world. And in this change to help to bring about the completing of the world and the salvation of all.

If we don't find the time to stop before Christmas to work out if we are on the right track then try to do it between Christmas and the new year.

It's worth doing. As John would say it's a matter of life and death. And as Victor Frankl the great Austrian psychiatrist who spent the war years in German concentration camps where his brother, his parents and his wife died, "we are responsible for the way we live our lives."

It is a severe truth, but one in accord with our Christian faith.

"That human beings do not simply exist; we always decide what our existence will be, and what we will become in the next moment."

I will close my ... favourite Advent stories. It's about change. Advent, waiting for the coming of the Christ child is about change.

Remember Jesus taught in stories — so see if you learn anything about yourself from this one.

It begins as all true stories do with the words Once upon a time...

Once upon a time there was a fabulously wealthy king who lived in a fabulously beautiful palace. But in spite of his wealth the king had a simple heart and a deep, sincere desire to find God.

He read books.

He consulted wise men.

He prayed in the gold covered palace chapel.

But to no avail.

He was not at peace

His life was not meaningful.

He could not find God.

One night, while lying in his soft, satin bed, the king was pondering why he was having so much trouble finding God and meaning in his life.

Suddenly he heard a terrible racket on the roof of the palace.

He went out on the balcony and shouted “Who’s up there? What’s going on?”

A voice, which he recognised to be that of a hermit who lived in a forest nearby, shouted back, “I’m looking for my goat. She’s lost, and I’m trying to find her.”

Angered by such a ridiculous response, the king shouted back, “How can you be so stupid as to think you’ll find your goat on the roof of my palace?”

The hermit shouted back, “And you, Your Highness! How can you be so stupid as to think that you’ll find God while dressed in silk pyjamas and lying on a bed of solid gold?”

These simple words of the old hermit jarred the king so severely that he rose from his bed, changed his life, and, eventually, became a great saint.

This was what John was trying to do with his call to “Repent for the kingdom of heaven is at hand!”

He was trying to jar people out of their beds of apathy and complacency, to get them ready for the one who would come after him.

This is what Ghandi meant when he said “you must be the change you wish to see in the world.” This is what we are called to do.

Each year, each Advent, each moment of our lives, we are called to change.

So don’t wait for others, don’t make excuses, don’t delay any more.

(This is the message, Why?)

Because, it’s time to act now. It’s time to repent. It’s time for a life change,

Now ... and every next moment of our lives until we can say with joy that St Paul’s prayer for the first Christians at Philippi has been answered in each one of us: “that our lives are circumspect and exemplary, lives that Jesus will be proud of: bountiful in fruits from the soul, making Jesus Christ attractive to all, getting everyone involved in the glory and praise of God.

Amen.