

St George's Cathedral  
Jerusalem  
10.30.am  
10<sup>th</sup> December 2017  
Advent II

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## **The Voice that Cries in the Wilderness**

### **Sermon preached to both the Arabic and Speaking Congregations**

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1. All four Gospels testify to an important truth, that John the Baptist stands at the beginning of the Gospel. He is the one who marks the end of the time of waiting and the beginning of the new age in Jesus. He is the last of the great prophets, the one who came after a long period when no prophet spoke to the people. God spoke only through the echo of his voice. In John the Baptist, the people could see an end to God's silence. Through John they could hear the Word of God.
2. John is conscious of his mission to call Israel to repentance and to baptize those who do repent. The people come and listen to him because they believe he speaks the authentic word of the Lord. Those who are moved by his call, confess their sins and are baptized by John. John calls everyone to change. John calls the whole of Israel without exception to a change of heart. If the people do not change, John says that they will be overcome by a catastrophe that will destroy Israel. He calls our attention, that the one who is to come will be more powerful and will exercise God's authority of judgement.
3. In a week of turmoil and confusion in Jerusalem, the voice of the prophet becomes one that we are all seeking to hear.
4. But what are we hoping might be said – soft words of calm in a time of calamity? Words of wisdom that will show us a new path? Or is it signs of how we are to respond amid the chaos?
5. We know that many are now suffering, and are deeply anxious as to what the future of this Holy City and this land, that we love so much, will now be.

6. The Prophet's voice echoes in the wilderness, it calls us into ways of justice and peace. These are its hallmarks. It might at times be difficult to hear, or difficult for us to digest – its message may require us to sacrifice some of the things we hold dear. We know that the prophets throughout the ages asked difficult questions – Isaiah, Elijah, Amos, Micah. They had messages that were delivered to people who did not like the message.
7. And where do we find these prophets? The most famous of them, who we remember this week and next week is John the Baptist. He was not found in a grand place, surrounded by the trappings of power, he was humbling living a pure and Godly life in the desert.
8. The prophet is among us, but he, or she, is not grand; the prophet is humble, meek, holy, prayerful. This is the person whom we should be listening too. Maybe we are quick to dismiss them, as our television screens point us to someone more powerful. But as a Church we are taught to listen for the voice of Christ in our midst, to recognise Christ in the other, even if that person is radically different to us and they may appear ignored by society.
9. We do not know what the future of this land is; for many centuries people have suffered here under different regimes; and they are suffering again today. The young and the old are fearful of the future. Many say –

“what shall we do?” or “what can we do?”

10. We can do much – we can keep heart, we can be strong, we can keep our faith alive, knowing that come-what-may, God is with us and he is the Prince of Peace revealed in the manger as a humble and beautiful child.
11. We can, as we heard in the 2<sup>nd</sup> letter of Peter, prepare ourselves this advent for this Prince of Peace, by ensuring we live in peace. We can remedy the disputes we have with our neighbours, we can ensure we care for the poor in our communities. We can, through our actions day-by-day, work for a better place.
12. In doing this, we do prepare the way for the Prince of Peace, and through our very actions we become God's prophets in this world. We are steadfast in his love and

his faithfulness, confident that through the very love of Christ, righteousness and peace will indeed kiss each other.

13. The voice that cries in the wilderness is addressed to us at these difficult times. We hear it especially during the time of advent, when as a community, we are called to a change of heart. During this week we have heard of a change. We need to listen to a different voice that speaks deep into our understanding of what justice is for this Holy City, a place recognised as sacred to all – to Jew, to Christian, to Muslim; to Israeli and to Palestinian. A City that by its existence speaks of peace and of harmony, and of respect to all humanity; a place that can be marked in some way as a capital not just for one nation, but for two, for Israel and for Palestine. This could help create a place of tolerance, of respect, and for all to flourish.
  
14. The prophetic voice needs to be heard, the call needs to be carried. It will be challenge addressed to each of us, as individuals and as a community: there are no exceptions. We are all aware of events in our own lives that need to be changed and to be touched by the power of God's forgiveness. We all need to be challenged by the word of the Lord. We do not have to go to the desert to hear the word of God; we hear it here, in this place, in the city. Hearing it and acting on it is the best preparation for the one who is to come.

**AMEN**