

A Sermon by Canon Maggie Guite

Advent 2 Year C

December 9th 2018

Luke 3.1-6

A voice in the wilderness

'The word of God came to John, son of Zechariah, in the wilderness'
(v.2)

- Luke emphasises that John both received God's word and proclaimed it 'in the wilderness' (vv.2 and 4)

What does 'wilderness mean to you?

- rocky Judaeon wilderness?
- a wild place of any kind, unaltered by human beings?
- a place that is reverting to that kind of state – 'my garden's becoming a bit of a wilderness'

Or perhaps something more personal

- A state of not belonging, of being isolated, being cast out or not recognised by other people: eg. Churchill's 'wilderness years'
- Or a painful psychological or spiritual inner state – 'life feels like a bit of wilderness: I don't quite know where I'm going, nothing seems to make sense or be worthwhile any more'.

Finally, we sometimes use the word 'wilderness' to describe social settings where normal laws and values

don't seem to apply, and where life may seem very chaotic and alarming.

Yes, the 'word of God came to John...in the wilderness' – and of course, literally speaking, he was in the rocky, dusty Judaeon wilderness. And to be out in that place, as in any 'wilderness' in the world, can be awe inspiring and sublime, under the great sky, with only the animals for company... – but also it can bring on a sense of social isolation, and maybe of painful psychological and spiritual disorientation. I wonder how much of this 'wilderness experience' John the Baptist felt?

If he did feel that sense that everything had drained away, his situation mirrored, in a sense, the situation of his whole nation – held down by the full might of the Roman empire, embodied in the Emperor Tiberius and his representative, Pontius Pilate, Israel was now divided into four parts – 3 mini-princelands over which Herod the Great's sons were permitted to rule as Roman puppets, and a fourth section – the heart of the nation, Judea and Jerusalem - directly ruled by Pilate. (v.1). Under such a divide and rule policy, the nation's humiliation was complete. This was total political 'wilderness' for a proud people

So, John heard the voice of God in the wilderness... and he *was* the voice of God in the wilderness his people were experiencing. And what was the message??

Echoing a prophet of long-ago, John shouted out that God could make the impossible happen – valleys filled in, and mountains cast low. God could do it – God was *going*

to do it. And it was going to happen in a totally unexpected way.

I believe God still speaks to people in the wilderness – in every kind of wilderness. You may have experienced this in your own life., in your own personal wildernesses. And I also believe that God still calls people to proclaim his message to others in their wildernesses – even in the wilderness of a whole nations.

The Lord came once in the historical Jesus, but he still comes, and will come again, in unexpected ways. And he remains the God of the impossible.

Maybe some of us here will be seized by this conviction, and find our calling to give to others this message of transformation and hope in the wilderness of this world..