

## SECOND SUNDAY OF ADVENT 2021

My Nana's house always had a front room ready for visitors. Unused and generally tidy, though the ironing did slip into it sometimes. If a special guest came it would be into that room they would be taken. The rest of us were in the back room by the gas fire.

For me, if someone comes, I have to do a quick rush round and pick up the papers on the floor, put the cushions back on the couch, shift a few books.

For bigger events people often spend quite a time getting the house ready. Christmas lunch often means shifting a table or tables about and rearranging the furniture.

Advent is a time when we are awaiting a special guest, obviously Jesus. We prepare to celebrate his first coming and look at our lives to see if we are living as we would like to, he would want us to, in expectation of his second arrival.

How can we do this? We need to ask ourselves, what kind of house we are, what kind of housekeeper.

For a start, just having one room ready and a mess in the others will not work. When Jesus comes he sees the whole of us, the whole house you might say. There is no way we can invite him into the bit we keep clean and tidy and not the rest.

And then a quick run around shifting the odd thing here and there, hanging up the odd bit of ours lives for a while and then letting it revert after we think he is off the scene, won't work either. (That's a bit like going to the gym for January, as part of our New Year's resolution, and then not bothering in February, if we get that far.)

What we need to use Advent for is a good look at the whole of our lives. An acceptance that we have good bits and the less tidy bits, those bits we would rather not let anyone else see, let alone Jesus.

Twice the first reading uses the word 'integrity', which we use generally to express a basic goodness in someone. Someone who can be relied upon.

But its origin is in 'wholeness'. Being 'one', not being divided into different parts, never two-faced, and so a person of integrity is someone you can trust. You get what you see.

So John the Baptist is pictured as someone of simplicity. Not stupid, but someone who has just one side. Who chooses to live in the desert, the wilderness, where life is simpler, and, as we will come to in the second of the gospel, more straight forward. John's life is contrasted with the lives of the sinners, those who need forgiveness. These are people who have lost their integrity. That need preparation before they can face the Lord. Who need to be straightened out.

In the second part of the gospel, sin is a crookedness in approach to life and to others. A way of life where we are not honest with ourselves and others. Where we hide parts of ourself from ourselves and from others and from God. (Now of course this does not mean we have to expose everything about ourselves to other people, that would be too much and in fact the Church fairly early on stopped asking everyone to make a public confession of their sins as the early monks used to do so.)

But we need to be honest about ourselves and accept ourselves as we are, and that certain parts of ourselves need work.

So when Luke quotes Isaiah about the preparation of the way for the Messiah, and of course is using it about Jesus now, declaring him to be the long-awaited Christ, he is saying that we have to make Jesus known, openly revealed to the world.

But this clarity, openness, straightforwardness, integrity needs to begin within us first.

There is a voice calling each of us to this reformation of our lives. It is not something we achieve in four weeks, but a process throughout our lives. Because the more we are people of integrity, the more people see us as people who can be trusted to speak the truth, then the more the way is open for others to hear the word of God and follow this path themselves through us. We become the way, we become the successors to John the Baptist.