

Sermon for Advent 2 (6th December 2009)

In the year 1998, in the 46th year of Queen Elizabeth II, when Tony Blair was Prime Minister of UK and George Carey was Archbishop of Canterbury, the word of God came to Gill Lovell, daughter of Gomer and Elsie, in her car just after the T-junction in White Waltham on her way to Oxford.

No, I haven't got delusions of adequacy, or think I'm John the Baptist, but I remember the moment, not when I had a blinding conversion experience, nor when I was 'born again', but when I was reflecting on a passage from Luke's gospel and it suddenly made sense in my life. That was the start of something new. It wasn't that I wasn't a Christian before that moment, I was. But something changed that day for me. And from then I knew I no longer had a take-it-or-leave-it faith, but a faith that was all the world to me.

The effect of the word of God on John the Baptist was to send him into the region all around the Jordan, proclaiming a baptism of repentance and crying out in the wilderness the way of the Lord, in preparation for the Lord's coming. The effect of the word of the Lord in Gill Lovell's life that day was this collar and the life of a jobbing vicar, and doing things like I did yesterday, taking part in my small way with thousands of others – Christian and non-Christian – in a protest march to tell our government that I want them to take climate change seriously and to do something that will help end the greedy and selfish use of natural resources that will lead to the destruction of our planet.

I'm not alone. Yesterday, Ann was with me as part of the march against climate change. And I know many of you are committed supporters of various different charities, like Berkshire Women's Aid, of which we have heard a little this morning, and of the Children's Society, or of Save the Children, or Tearfund or Christian Aid – I could go on ...

I just want to point this out to you from today's gospel reading: the word of God did not stop when it came to John the Baptist, or Jesus, or the apostles and saints; the word of God comes to you and me, today, now and every day, if we will hear it and let it reach into us to change us.

Luke, in his gospel account, carefully located John in history; John was had a life in a real community when the word of the Lord came to him, just as you and I have a life in our communion when the word of the Lord comes to us. The effect of the word of the Lord on John was that he spoke the word of God with his mouth and his lifestyle.

In years to come, what might be said of you and me? In the year 2009, in the reign of Queen Elizabeth II when Gordon Brown was Prime Minister and Rowan Williams was Archbishop, the people of God in Burghfield said ... what? The people of God in Burghfield did ... what?

Do you want it said of you and of this church that we kept things going nicely? Or that we were faithful churchgoers? Or do you want it said that we were passionate about the gospel of Jesus Christ, known for our love, our acts of compassion and the integrity of our lives? I know what I would want said of me.

John the Baptist had his role to fulfil in his time and in his place. What is our role to perform here and now?

I end with the words of St Paul, and my prayer for you and myself this Advent is *that your love may overflow more and more with knowledge and full insight to help you to determine what is best, so that in the day of Christ you may be pure and blameless, having produced the harvest of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ for the glory and praise of God. Amen.*

Blessings
Gill