

December 11, 2022 – Third Sunday of Advent
Spiritual Restoration
Gospel of Matthew 11:2-11
Fr. John

In this Sunday's first reading, the prophet Isaiah, speaks of the desert beginning to bloom again and life beginning to return to what was a barren and desolate landscape.

All of this might be a good analogy to our experience of life gradually being restored after almost three years of dealing with a pandemic and the dormancy which it imposed on so many aspects of our endeavours.

The other evening Fr. Oliver and I enjoyed the annual Christmas/Advent choral concert presented by students of our four Regina Catholic high schools - a concert that wasn't feasible for the last two years.

In our parish, we are looking forward to restoring many of our Sunday liturgical ministries which we had to greatly restrict over the period of the pandemic. [And I am hoping that many of you have read and returned your stewardship recommitment forms which we put out several weeks ago].

Restoration was not an unknown phenomenon in biblical times either. The return of many of the Jewish people to their homeland and their ancestral religious centre of Jerusalem after over 70 years of captivity and exile in Babylon was a major event in their history.

In the New Testament, Jesus restores sight to the blind, hearing to the deaf, healing to the lame, cleansing to lepers as a sign of God's desire to restore wholeness to humankind.

In our contemporary world, our Ukrainian brothers and sisters will look forward to the restoration of their country when, hopefully, hostilities will eventually cease.

But the gradualness that often accompanies restoration can be painful and can create impatience on the part of those who desire a 'quick fix'. It is out of that impatience that John the Baptist sent his disciples to find out if indeed this Jesus of Nazareth was the long awaited Messiah or not. John, like many of his Jewish contemporaries, was expecting the Messiah to be of a much more dynamic, fiery nature than Jesus seemed to be. He didn't seem to be raising an army and inciting the people to overthrow their Roman occupiers and thereby restore Israel to the glory days of Kings David and Solomon.

Instead, Jesus was going about proclaiming and peacefully inaugurating a far different type of kingdom - one that was built on healing rather than conquest; forgiveness rather than vengeance; humility rather than arrogance; simplicity rather than opulence.

Some would call this a paradigm shift - a radical move from one set of assumptions to another. We have seen this in the world of technology. In the 1850's the elegant clipper ships were quickly replaced and out performed by the less attractive steamships. And in more recent times mechanical devices were replaced by digital ones. [I still have my old slide rule from my high school physics class.]

Jesus presented us with a spiritual paradigm shift that John and the Old Testament prophets couldn't imagine. That is why he said that those who believed and practised this new way of living were greater than even John the Baptist.

So what does all this mean for us during this Advent season? Do we really 'buy in' to the kind of kingdom that Jesus presents us with? Or are we waiting for a different kind of Messiah - one more to our liking!!

In theory, we may like what Jesus says and demonstrates. But Jesus desires disciples not merely admirers! Putting the message into practice.

Here is one suggestion. The spiritual writer, Matthew Kelly, suggests this: Think of someone that you have either had a disagreement with or have intentionally ignored for some time and give them a call or write them a note expressing your desire to restore your friendship. This may not always meet with success - at least not immediately. But you will have reached out and watered the desert of a parched relationship. And who knows? Perhaps the words of Isaiah will hold true for you: 'The wilderness and the dry land shall be glad, the desert shall rejoice and blossom ... and rejoice with joy and singing.'

May it be so for all of us as we prepare to celebrate the birth of the Saviour.