

The woman who saw what was happening told him, friend, "You also wrote, here's my heart, O take and seal it."

You can offer your heart again to God, Mr. Robinson. It's not too late."

John the Baptist calls us to prepare, Advent gives us that opportunity...to take time aside, to see those areas where we have wandered, where we have left and to say "you are the only hero I need, I'm coming home. Amen.

## St Mary's Sanderstead Advent 2 'Be Prepared' Fr. Grant Cohen

Today, is the second week of Advent, where today's reading are about John the Baptist who comes to 'Prepare the way of the Lord...'

Every year I tell myself, 'next year I'll be more prepared', so a month ago when I went to the Isle of Wight I planned to write my Christmas cards so that I could send them in time, the trouble is I got side-tracked by a good movie and they didn't get written.

I was at Chartwell a week ago and amongst all the seasonal cards on sale, there was only one with a religious theme...and even then it was just angels. I've never seen a Christmas card that features John the Baptist after all what would it say... "Merry Christmas you brood of vipers now repent! Available now in all good card shops!!!

I don't think they'd sell because it's not the message of Christmas that people want to hear.

I was chatting with someone the other day who said that actually they like the preparation of Christmas more than the actual event...and I can sympathise with that feeling because by the time Christmas arrives I'm actually exhausted, and the Christmas day feels rather flat following the all the carol services, the parties, and the gatherings, but that's when I think advent really gives meaning. So that we can take time to pause, reflect and consider what is about to happen, so that when it does get here we've already given space to what it's all about.

There were once of two medieval barons who lived upon the Rhine. Between them existed a terrible feud. The stronger of the two swept upon his enemy utterly wrecked his castle, and murdered all of the family, save one little boy who was carried away with him to his castle.

The boy grew and an elderly man told him about the ancient feud and of what his father had suffered at the hands of him in whose castle he now lived.

The lad was enraged and vowed to avenge his father's house and to humiliate the man who had brought him up. Years later, on a dark and stormy night the old baron was making merry in his great hall.

When the hilarity was at its height the boy now grown signalled to the enemy outside. That night the baron perished, and his estates passed to the one whose father the baron had killed.

You might wonder why I tell that story...I tell it because its moral is in essence what John the Baptist came to say...that if there lurks one unconquered enemy in the midst of our hearts, then the estate of our lives is in jeopardy.

The message of John the Baptist was good news, but only in the same sense as the doctor who took his patient into a room and said, "I have some good news and some bad news." The patient said, "Give me the good news first." "Well," the doctor said, "They're about to name a brand-new incurable disease after you."

Or, the story of Sally, who phoned her husband at work for a chat. "I'm sorry he said, "but I'm snowed over with work today. I don't have time to chat." Sally replied, "But I've got some good news and some bad news for you." "OK," he said, "but could you just give me the good news right now?" "Okay," agreed Sally. "Well, you'll be happy to know that the air bags in our brand new car work perfectly!"

The good news of John was a double-edged sword, God is coming, but... you better get your lives ready for him.

The gospels bring us good news because we need it. Jesus once said that he came so that we might have a full and meaningful life, a life filled with purpose.

But sadly, our lives don't always feel like that and so we invented Spiderman, Superman, Batman, James Bond, people who we can watch, can escape to who irrespective of whether we are prepared or not will save us.

But that just fiction...

John the Baptist came to remind people that there is hope, that God hadn't forgotten them that he was still their hero. But he also told them in no uncertain terms that they needed to prepare for his coming.

Proper preparation is so important.

I read about a priest who ran out of time to prepare for a sudden funeral. He went to his computer, found the last funeral service he had done, and did a quick 'find and replace,' putting the name of the newly deceased woman, 'Bertha,' in place of the woman in the previous funeral, who was called Mary.

Everything went fine until he came to the end of his message where he read the Apostles' Creed, declaring that Jesus was conceived by the Holy Spirit and was born of the Virgin Bertha.

John the Baptist told people, "You need to get ready because someone more powerful than I is coming."

It was a bright Sunday morning in 18th century, but the famous poet Robert Robinson's mood was anything but sunny. All along the street there were people hurrying to church, but in the midst of the crowd Robinson was a lonely man. The sound of church bells reminded him of years past when his faith in God was strong and the church was an integral part of his life.

It had been years since he had been to church, years of wandering, disillusionment, and gradual defection from the God he once loved. That love which was once passionate had slowly burned out leaving him dark and cold inside.

That day, however he heard the clip-clop of a horse approaching behind him. Turning, he lifted his hand to hail the driver. But then he saw that the cab was occupied by a young woman dressed in finery for the Lord's Day. He waved the driver on, but the woman in the carriage ordered the carriage to be stopped.

"Sir, I'd be happy to share this carriage with you," she said to Robinson. "Are you going to church?"

Robinson was about to decline, but he paused. "Yes," he said "I am going to church."

As the carriage rolled forward Robert Robinson and the woman exchanged introductions. An there was a flash of recognition in her eyes when he told her his name.

"That's an interesting coincidence," she said, reaching into her purse and she withdrew a small book of inspirational verse, opened it to a ribbon-bookmark, and handed it to him. "I was just reading a verse by a poet named Robert Robinson. Could it be...?"

He took the book, nodding and said "Yes, I wrote these words years ago."

"How wonderful, that I'm sharing a carriage with the author of these very lines!"

But Robinson barely heard her. He was absorbed in the words he was reading. They were words that would one day be set to music and become a great hymn of the faith...

Come, Thou Fount of every blessing,  
Tune my heart to sing Thy grace'  
Streams of mercy, never ceasing,  
Call for songs of loudest praise.

His eyes slipped to the bottom of the page where he read:

"Prone to wander, Lord, I feel it, prone to leave the God I love; here's my heart, O take and as he considered and reflected upon the words he had written. He realised that he had indeed wondered and left the God he had once known.