



Weekly Reflection

Advent 2B, 2023 • Mark 1: 1-8

Mark begins the beginning of the coming of Jesus within the world differently to the other Gospels. There is no birth story, no Mary or Elizabeth, no donkeys or ancestral origins.

Mark is far more radical. He begins when time and space were non-existent, from the *mysterium tremendum* (awe inspiring mystery); before the birth of the beauty and chaos of human language and social and cultural organisation and the play of power and the growth of the imbalances of power.

In Mark 1:1, the words, "The beginning of the gospel..." connect with the first words of Genesis, *in the beginning* God created life: now, John the Baptist just *appears from the margins* of society to

open the pathway "for the renewal of the great Story of God's creative activity in the world" (Ched Myers). In Bill Loader's wonderful image, "John is a very good roadbuilder for advent: "Advent preparation is preparation for life". Which means a different life we are living now!

This construction is "the road less travelled by" (Robert Frost); Mark will use the term throughout his Gospel as the journey which is "on the way", "on the road", following the way of Jesus. John prepares individuals, communities and societies for this advent of an alternative way of being: it can only start with "repentance for the forgiveness of sins"; but not as we Evangelicals narrow it to personal wrongs. In Luke's version when the crowds ask John, "What then should we do?", Luke gives examples: whoever has two cloaks or more food, share with others; tax collectors, be just and fair; and soldiers not to have power over others: repentance is about "turning away" from the way we create life around us which disempowers us and others; it is a social, cultural, economic way of living, sharing-equal-power together. This is a spirituality of being, holistic and organic.

The people of John's time and culture did not find this spirituality of being in Jerusalem. In that urban space social and cultural power was unequally organised and shared. To prepare for the coming of new life and to be transformed and forgiven, people travelled to the margins, to the wilderness. Which implies, the human constructions that we create always seem to be taken over by people who rule over the lives of others, and do not share resources equally. Even the followers of Jesus, in their journey with Jesus in Mark's Gospel, are seduced by power; they desire privilege, become exclusive, are the ones who know what others need, and are inclusive on their terms; and humbly, we should acknowledge, this can be us as the church today!

This "voice" Isaiah hears is beyond social and cultural constructions. The "voice" can only cleanse and renew from the uninhabited margins, the out-side-of-culture space, which is untainted and unspoiled by unequal human power and control. The French philosopher Derrida writes that voices from empty spaces precede human language, they unsettle what is known and fixed, upsetting conventional thinking and expression.

This Advent, are you able to find time and space to journey to the edges and margins of your "Jerusalem", away from the culture you live in; of your family, your congregation, the culture of your birth? And at these margins, to hear the "voice" of the good news again, the Word of God, which is actually the story of Jesus and his followers in Mark! Can we set aside the next

few weeks to look at ourselves through these stories, and examine how we express power, and where we feel powerless, at individual, social and cultural levels.

Then, like John the Baptist we will emerge from the wilderness with a word from God. It may be an unexpected and an unwelcome word, because it unsettles and calls for a preparation of new life, which may challenge the way we live now! And God, who is creator is also a future God who seeks to lure humanity into more joyful and loving and peaceful and just ways of living with each other!

Vladimir Korotkov