

## Sermon for the Third Sunday in Advent

When I read the opening sentence passage from the letter of James, I was immediately reminded of a wonderful quote from *The Count of Monte Cristo* by Alexandre Dumas: "All human wisdom is summed up in two words; wait and hope."

The heart of the Advent season is waiting and hoping. Many of the traditions we have in Advent help us to be patient, and to mark the time with a sense of hope and awe. From Advent calendars opened day by day, to the candles of Advent wreath, we have tangible reminders that time is passing, and that Christmas day and the proclamation of Jesus' birth is drawing near. This is something worth waiting for, and worth preparing for.

Today we temporarily shift liturgical colours. The purple vestments are replaced by rose, because today is 'Gaudete Sunday', 'Rejoice Sunday'. We are called, in the midst of this season of penitence when we seek to return to the core of our faith before we celebrate the wonder of the incarnation, to rejoice. We are reminded that we are approaching a season of festivity, and that there is much to be both thankful for, and to rejoice in.

The Letter of James also uses some beautiful natural imagery. Jesus himself would often use agricultural metaphors, because they were understood and made his point effectively. They still do. James writes that the farmer patiently waits for the crop to grow, knowing that nature is working its marvels and that the earth will bear its fruit in due season. The farmer has the wisdom to know that they cannot rush this process, but trusts that the crop will sprout and grow and be nurtured until it is ready for harvesting.

We need to be similarly patient – with ourselves and with each other. James offers words of encouragement – "strengthen your hearts" – and also counsels gentleness with each other. "Do not grumble against one another", he advises, because we need to continue to treat others as we would wish to be treated. This is a time when we are mindful of our judgement, and we need to remember that we will need to account for our words and actions – but remember, the judge we will face is not an unkind one, but is compassionate.

Finally, James reminds us of the conduct of the prophets, who endured suffering with patience, while speaking "in the name of the Lord". We have the prophets as people who endured the difficulties of life with fortitude and resilience, and who remained faithful to God in spite of everything they faced.

In the Gospel, we encounter the prophet John the Baptist, and he is as faithful as James describes. When the passage begins, John is imprisoned (at the hands of Herod), but he is undeterred in his calling to direct people to Jesus, and to point him out as the Messiah.

John asks Jesus, via his followers, “Are you the one who is to come, or are we to wait for another?” I rather think that John already knows the answer, and is posing the question purely for his disciples’ benefit.

Jesus replies, outlining all the miraculous things that people will see that will provide the proof people may require to understand who he is and his purpose. Jesus ends his statement by saying, “And blessed is anyone who takes no offence at me”. By this, I think that he is blessing those who see what he does, who welcome his actions and words as those that liberate and comfort those in need, and which reflect the generosity of God. And surely, if we believe that Jesus is the Messiah, we should welcome all that he does in the service of others.

Having demonstrated who he is, Jesus then begins to speak about John, and teaches us about the prophets. Jesus asks the crowd, who assumedly had sought John out to hear his teachings, “What did you go out into the wilderness to look at?”.

He speculates about their intentions. Did they go out to John to see some kind of spectacle? Some kind of performer? The implication is that they did not. They went to see a genuine prophet. Someone who bears a message from God that needs to be heard, and acted upon.

Jesus affirms this by saying that John is a prophet, “and more than a prophet”. John is the one spoken of as the one who points the way to the Messiah. He is the messenger, the forerunner. The one who prepares the crowd to receive the Messiah and listen and learn from them and their teachings.

May we use the remaining time of Advent to take both John and Jesus’ words to heart. May we also be ready to follow John’s wisdom – looking where he directs us, and willing to listen to his wisdom that points the way to Christ. Let us be open to receiving Jesus as the Messiah, the one who was looked for as humanity’s redeemer, and find great joy in his coming among us.

In doing so, we will fulfil both the commandment of this day – to rejoice – and we will be living by that human wisdom which Dumas wrote of, as people who wait and hope.

Rev. Dr Emily Fraser  
All Saints, South Hobart and St Raphael’s, Fern Tree  
The Third Sunday in Advent  
14 December 2025