

Our human experience is built around the human capacity for renewal and the probability of recovery. The experience of humanity is grounded in the need for new starts, for new beginnings and for renewal. Whether it be at a personal level linked to the human hope in every new sunrise after the night has gone. The seasonal renewal of each spring after the hardness of winter. Any community's renewal after floods or earthquakes or all kind of localised natural disasters. Of a national recuperation from war or financial collapse or economic mismanagement. Or indeed the global recovery from worldwide pandemic or changes in climate. Human's need to believe that there is always the chance that things will improve and that a new start is possible even after the darkest hour.

Advent is the message of renewal. It is the re-start of the Christian journey. And it is a reminder that no matter how many times we fall into darkness or trial or tribulation .. as individuals or communities or nations .. we can and will be revived. Out of the darkness into the light. From deepest night to the break of dawn. From intense conflict to the embrace of peace. Every trial will result in a new beginning.

We recall this in the message of the Prophets that we focus on this morning on the Second Sunday of Advent. A voice heard in times of trial that there will be comfort once again. The words of Isaiah echo through the ages 'Comfort, comfort my people, says your God. Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and proclaim to her that her hard service has been completed.' It is the sentiment we recall in our Morning Prayer as a Christian community even today ' The night has passed and the day lies open before us'. We must never lose that tradition of starting the day with such a prayer for it is the bedrock of our faith. That every night has a morning.

So we find ourselves in a rather beautiful place, a mystical moment, this morning where we appear to be starting again once more. Starting from scratch as it were. Start again this Advent. As we light the second candle on the wreath for the very first time ... and yet we have throughout our lives and throughout the generations lit the second candle of the Advent wreath time and time again. Just as the sun has risen day after day from time immemorial .. and yet this does not detract from the message that this time we are able to begin again completely.

The circular and endless possibility of starting over. This is at the heart of Advent. Has your year been a difficult one? Have you known darkness and distress? Advent is here. Lift your head. Look forward. A light is coming and the darkness has not overcome the light.

This is the message of the Prophets and of John the Baptist. A voice crying come and be baptised into a faith which will immerse you in the waters of renewal and cleansing and revival so that you can start again. Draw near to a Messiah who will renew your fortunes and stir hope within you. It is a voice to be heard even in the desert. Where all hope seems lost. A voice making a path for you.

And this morning we acknowledge the truth that we have been here before. In our lives and in our churches. We have had to start again so many times we have lost count. But this morning we acknowledge this is OK. Starting again is the human experience. It does not reveal weakness but strength. It is the message of hope.

So we will light our Second Advent candle this year. Knowing that we have done it before and we will do it again. We will set out this year with good intentions and will fail. We will achieve some good no doubt as our intentions allow for this. But ultimately next Advent we will need this same message again of renewal and new starts. This is OK. Christ came for this reason. To seek and save the lost. Not in a single moment but again and again each day of our lives. We have a faith born out of baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. Let us each year, each day each moment remember the power of this faith to cleanse and renew our lives that we might one day receive the reward of good and faithful Advent pilgrims walking towards the light of Christ.