

THE REV. PAUL HIGGINSON  
Advent 3, 2022

## All Saints'

Stir up your power, O Lord, and with your great might come among us!

So here we are on this wintery morning, the 3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday in Advent, much like any other Sunday in Littleton NH, or wherever else the Episcopal people of God gather. I've got to admit there's a certain feeling of comfort, a predictability, like that old sweater that always feels so right, as I open my hymn book, or follow along in the service sheet. The prayers, the hymns, mostly so familiar, almost lead to the point of worship on cruise control.

To be honest there are days when the words come out and the moves are made but the mind is far, far away. Yes, and I expect I'm not alone.

It's the words of Jesus, this morning, that bring me upright, snap me out of my personal twilight zone. "What did you go out into the wilderness to see? A pine tree shaken by the wind, someone dressed in fine duds, bright lights, music, friends, coffee hour? A prophet perhaps? Just what brought each and every one of us here this morning, when after a busy week we could have slept in, gone out for a leisurely breakfast or any number of exciting diversions? What did you, did I, come out to see?"

Jesus responds this way to the disciples who are sent to him by John the Baptist, who is currently being held in prison, as he inquires as to who this Jesus is. The blind receive their sight, the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, the

deaf hear, the dead are raised and the poor have good news brought to them. If Jesus had spoken those words today, he might have been thinking in the back of his mind, really, it doesn't take a rocket scientist to figure out something mighty powerful is happening here.

Interesting how this interaction takes place with no media present, no advance PR, no celebrities to pump up the crowd, not even the big story at 11. The blind see, the cripples walk, the dead are raised and so much more happens without a big splash, all taking place within the course of everyday life.

Contrast that with the political hopefuls who have recently brought their messages to the local area and the dreaded invasion of would be Presidential wanna-bees soon to come. They make impossible promises, like healthcare for all, but not one of them can restore sight to the blind, help the lame walk, let alone raise someone from the dead. As our psalm points out, "Put not your trust in rulers, nor any child of the earth, for there is no help in them." Wondering out loud, who would draw the bigger crowd in the parking lot this morning, Joe, Donald or Jesus?

The politician promises change, at least that's what they proclaim, with Jesus that's what you get. He turns the known world upside down much to the frustration of those in power. Try as they might as politicians want us to believe, no leader past or present, can restore sight or make the lame walk. It's just not going to happen.

All of today's readings call our attention to real change, most of which borders on the seemingly impossible. Streams flow in the desert, freedom from ravenous beasts, strangers, orphans and widows are cared for, prisoners set free and healings beyond belief. Why, because as we celebrate in less than 2 weeks, Jesus has his power stirred up and will come among us.

Again, the collect cries out, "Stir up your power, O Lord, and with great might come among us". But is that what we really want? Be careful what you pray for, you just might get it! For if indeed the Lord were to rise up his power among us, things, life would have to change. Change of course removes the warm fuzziness, the comfortable worship of which I spoke earlier. To take the collect further it reminds us that because we are hindered by our sins it's only through the Lord's power that we might be delivered.

Change is a life constant whether we want to recognize it or not. A quick look at our bodies will show us that time is a constant re-shaper. Jeffery D Jones, a Baptist minister, struggling with how to inspire his congregation writes in his book *Traveling Together*, that he comes to discover that the world today is nothing like the place he knew 30, 40, 50 years ago. Mobility, instant worldwide communication and a culture that treats Sunday with store openings and sports as if it were just any other day of the week, has made Church less relevant in peoples lives.

What then did you come out to see this morning? A prophet perhaps? Prophets are a spicy bunch to say the least, what they have to say has a way of

getting under our skin. Or perhaps like all our readings today they have a way of opening the eyes of the blind. They don't have to wear clothes of camel's hair or live on the fringes of society to get our attention. They go on ahead to prepare the way, to call us to account for as James says, "we are hindered by our sins". Surely as James exhorts us not to grumble against one another lest we be judged. I'm convinced prophets of many sorts are among us today.

Whose voice are you ready to hear today, is it the voice of contentment or do we truly wish to stir up the power of the Lord?

In some sense Fr Curtis in his way plays the role of prophet. He came to us almost 7 years ago with a background of Church life from the many places beyond our experience and has shared them with us. He's provided us with insights of ourselves that we are too close to recognize, some for good and some that sorely hinder us. By rotating the consecration prayer each week he's found a way to keep us on our toes and away from liturgical cruise control.

Most of us if, you're anything like me, aren't overly comfortable with change. It's far too easy to slip into life patterns that feel safe and secure. Take the potato for example, if we find that eating a boiled potato is to our liking and the only way we've ever eaten one, then anything different can't be right. Without ever being exposed to mashed, baked, French fried, au gratin and the like, our lives would be secure but unchallenged, and if we are to grow, change has to happen.

The parish where I spent most of my early adult life held coffee hour in a narrow loud, hard to hear room. There were large windows and a door to a fine flat lawn just outside; when someone suggested, in the nicer weather, to socialize outside. The response? "Never did it that way before and anyway how could you get the coffee through the window?"

Stir up your power and come among us is what we've just prayed for. Remember, if you will, the notes posted on the wall last Sunday and the survey that was emailed this week asking for your vision of what this parish could and can become. Hopefully they paint a picture of what this church could be, and who can guess, what gifts and insights our new rector will bring, that my friends will surely result in change.

In less than 2 short weeks we will celebrate the birth of Jesus as it has been celebrated in this place going on 150 years. Will it be the same as last year, I doubt it, still it's only natural to want what we're used to and yet what does our Lord expect from us? If we can get beyond our clinginess to the past and beyond the warm fuzzies of a baby in a manger we'll discover a world different from today. Are you ready for that world?

In that world rivers will flow in the desert, the lion will lie down with the ox, the blind see, the lame walk, war will be no more and then some. That's what can take place here at All Saints', if we can allow the power. We call down among us, to erase our blindness, lift both our spirits and our voices and yes even try potato in a way we've never tasted. The possibilities are endless.

God has blessed each of us with a variety of gifts with which to do the seemingly impossible. There are seeds planted deep inside you and me that require us to be patient as we await the spring rains to make them grow. It doesn't matter how old our garden plot is, for as long as we have breath, we have no sell by date for retirement in God's plans for us. If we truly believe in what we pray for, those gifts will enable us to bloom out of our comfort zones and get ready for a crop to burst forth like no other.

So, I say,

Stir up your power, then, O lord and with great might come among us. Amen