

Advent Week 3: A Reflection by Sr Mary Toner

As I read and reflected on this Sunday's readings, I kept being drawn back to the word 'Prophet'. John even in his imprisonment had heard something important was going on and had sent others to find out but he still questioned, checked out 'are you the real thing', the One promised? Jesus answer, response is simple, look, see, hear, listen, see what has been happening around you, my action is bringing about 'Life'.

I think he posed and presented a challenge to the people, maybe made them a little uncomfortable, question themselves. Jesus then had a further question, this about John and he asks them to think about this. What expectations did you have, what profile, image were you expecting him to fit, what were you doing there in the wilderness, what were you looking for?

A moment of contemplation:

Allow yourself allow yourself to enter the scene of Jesus' questioning, what does it reveal to you? What stands out to you?

Matthew 11:2-11



So who are the Prophets who you hear and discern today, who tell us to look around us, what are we seeing, hearing, understanding, who challenges our way of thinking and perceiving to respond with Good News to the people in our world, a world that is very complex.

One way for me has been as a volunteer with JRS UK. The privilege to share prayer each week with a group of Refugee/Asylum Seeker Women over a number of years. Now they are some of today's prophets, the women who have changed me, bearers of hope who have such a strong faith and belief that God will see them through, and let's face it, hope is much needed in our world today.

And as we wait in this season of Advent, I am given more to reflect on, we wait for many things every day, in shops, for transport, for someone to arrive etc. So what is it like to wait as a refugee/asylum seeker? They appreciate to be made welcome, to belong, that their voice is helped to be heard by advocacy, to be treated as a human person with respect, the fear of feeling unsafe, ignored, not seen, to have to rely on others for your every need, the threat of deportation.

In our world displacement has never been greater, countries and governments on the whole choose not to respond or inadequately. Perhaps they think the people and situations will disappear or evaporate. Yet they wait in camps and other situations in hope and misery.

The waiting in Advent is a time of anticipation and the welcoming of 'Life', but it will demand our desire and participation to be open, to be changed by others and the world. To step beyond the boundaries of our comfort zones as Jesus did and to respond with faith and courage and the grace promised and given by God.

**'Strengthen all weary hands
Steady all trembling knees
And say to all the faint hearts
'Courage' - 'Do not be afraid'**

Is 35:3-4