

TUESDAY COMMUNION

"John, Jesus and Righteous Living!"

Hymn:

Reading: Luke 3. 10-23

Prayers:

According to the story Luke tells us, John and Jesus were cousins. John's ministry comes first and Luke speaks of that ministry having two strands.

The **first strand** is that traditional prophetic concern with the kind of "right living" that God wants from people of every time and place. It's interesting that amongst the crowds who come to listen to John are Roman soldiers.

Presumably they were gentiles since Jews were excused military service because they wouldn't fight on the Sabbath! These soldiers, asked John,

"What should we do?"

Probably these soldiers were acting almost like police and had the power to persuade people to part with money on a number of different pretexts including what we would call "protection rackets".

John told them,

"Don't extort anyone, don't practice blackmail. Be satisfied with your pay."

The **second strand** of John's ministry is his pointing forward.

This, too, is typical of the prophets for they believed in a God who acts in history to bring about change in our world. The message of John is that God is about to act and to come amongst them in the person of a Messiah who will separate the world into the righteous and the unrighteous. The righteous will be gathered together like wheat into the barn but the unrighteous will be destroyed like chaff in a fire.

In many ways it's a traditional prophetic message. Live "rightly" for soon, very soon God is coming to judge humankind. Luke tells us that many in the crowds wondered whether John himself was to be the Messiah.....

In this account John denies that he is the Messiah and speaks of his being almost as nothing in comparison with the one whom God is sending. He isn't even worthy to act as a servant and take off the Messiah's sandals.....

Yet, one of the questions, which lingers is about the precise relationship between John and Jesus.

The Gospels and other documents give us hints that John was the originator of a widespread movement. In Luke's second volume, the Acts of the Apostles, he tells of how when Paul was at Ephesus in Modern Turkey he met an impressive person called Apollos, a native of Alexandria, who knew only the baptism of John.

If men of ability and integrity who knew only the baptism of John were spread around the Eastern Mediterranean John was clearly a considerable figure.

Indeed, Luke himself, seems anxious that a clear difference should be noted between John and Jesus.

Whereas the other Gospels all tell of how Jesus came to the river Jordan to be baptised by John Luke tells the story differently.

First, he tells us that John has been imprisoned because he had spoken against Herod marrying, Herodias, his brother's wife.

Secondly, in a rather circuitous way he tells us "when all the people were baptised, and when Jesus also was baptised....."

John isn't even mentioned in the account of Jesus' baptism!

What Luke does tell us is that Jesus' baptism was a momentous moment in his life. It was after his baptism and whilst he was praying that he received the Spirit of God, the Spirit who would be with him for the rest of his life.

It was a Spirit which would make Jesus a different kind of prophet, a prophet who looked beyond the outward acts of people and into thoughts and motives of women and men.

Jesus' ministry was also be one to be characterised by his reaching out to those very people who John would have regarded as "unrighteous".

His life and preaching makes us ask new questions about what it means to be "righteous" or "unrighteous", indeed, whether any of us can claim to be wholly "righteous".

Jesus becomes the prophet who challenges our self-righteousness and makes us look to a God whose righteousness is seen in the quality of his love, his grace. In our communion we recognise that it is that gift of grace we all need and that Jesus want us to live graciously in our dealings with others.

John forcefully reminded us of the standards of outward righteous which we ought to display in the way we live.

Jesus speaks to a more profound understanding both of the nature and activity of God and the quality of life God wants to see in our lives.

Amen.