

We are constantly having to rediscover the good in ourselves and in one another or, just as well perhaps, to rediscover the God in ourselves and in one another. And the two go together: the rediscovery of the good in ourselves enables us to see the good in one another, the God in one another. John the Baptist is beginning to doubt whether Jesus was the Christ after all – the Messiah, the Saviour. Prison and the prospect of death have, not surprisingly, shaken his confidence, as times of trial do for us all. Is God, is prayer, is religion just as meaningless as a reed blowing in the wind signifying nothing except the blowing of the wind? But then we have to recover those moments when God, when Christ, really did seem to be at work: those sudden moments of reversal when glory, when joy, has a chance to have its say – the blind see, the lame walk, lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear. Which is as much a rediscovery of the good in ourselves as out there. Miracles happen and we see the world in a new light, we have intimations that this new light might be the truer light after all – the one that sustains us whatever of the world speaks to the contrary. After Jesus reaffirms John's faith to the messengers in this manner he follows it with a much stronger affirmation to the crowd of John's status as one greater than a prophet, greater indeed than all born before him and yet least in kingdom of heaven for he has been herald to the one who will bring this kingdom into being: he is greater than all prophets but not greater than this Messiah who will be, who is, greater than any Messiah, any saviour imagined so far. He's been herald of a regime change in which the kingship of heaven, becomes the kingship of earth, a world in which we can rediscover the goodness, the God, in ourselves and one another. Can rediscover but may not for this regime change is also a judgement.

“Look your God is coming, vengeance is coming, The retribution of God: he is coming to save you”

Regime change begins with ourselves. Just make sure you are ready for this, this cleansing fire when it comes. Be patient, endure suffering without complaint,

“For your example.... In submitting with patience take the Prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord”

“Do not make complaints against one another”, do not fail to find the good, the God, in one another in this time of waiting “so as not to be brought to judgement oneself”. This is the perennial tussle between what we have to do for ourselves and what God does for us – intellectually we seem to resolve it with the idea of prevenient grace, we prepare ourselves for God, we turn to God, we repent and admit our sin, but this is God already at work within us, already at work within John the Baptist and all the prophets and all that prophesies God, all those moments of sudden insight, sudden joy, sudden overturning of misfortune. Greater still all those moments within our suffering which tell us something more is going on than we ourselves can fathom, something more which can often come to us through one another: those other hearts, those other messengers sent to us to reassure us in our doubt that our judgement is true. This is

faith speaking to faith. Yes, Christmas may have been taken over by other forces but the Christ-child has come and will come again to speak to the Christ-child in you.

This is beautifully summed up in the words of our morning hymn:

Deep in the darkness seeds of light are sown,
The joyous light the dark has never known;
Beneath the ground the living waters sing
And secret streams new life, new gladness bring:
Before the seas were shaped, the Fountain played,
And light shone out before the stars were made.

....

Sow hope beyond our senses bring,
Unseal our ears to hear your waters sing,
Unseal our inward eye to know your light,
Though still the darkness presses on our sight.
Sustain us till the day you quench all thirst
And shine unhidden, Light who loved us first!

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