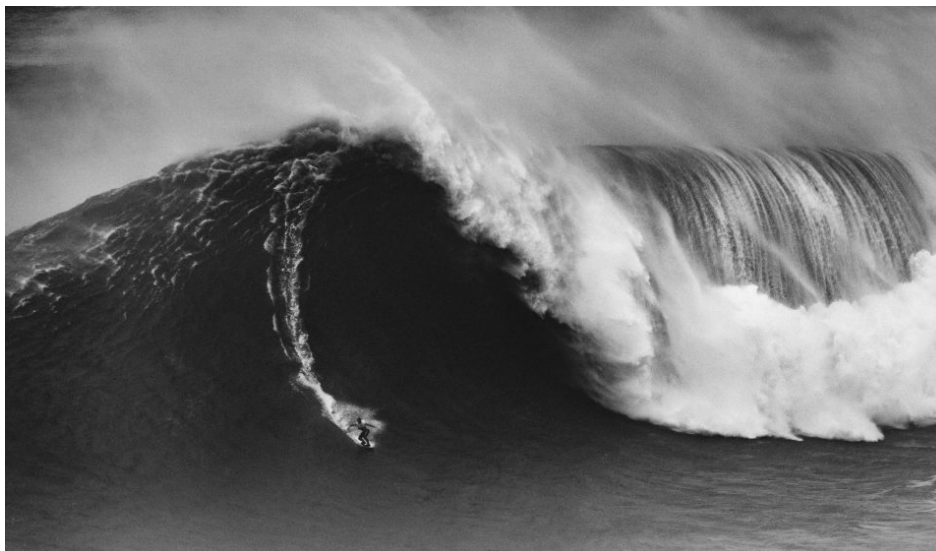


Lessons from the elements during Advent
(a series of reflections by Rev'd Andrew Down)

Water

How might we stand up and stand tall when the seas are raging?



Luke 21: 25-36

In the gospel for the first Sunday of Advent we have the image of a raging ocean and Christ coming at these times. How can we experience Christ in times of turmoil and terror? Big wave surfers know how to handle such things. Surfers develop key skills to allow them to navigate the ocean. They are alert to the shore using landmarks and fixed points to orientate themselves. They are alert to the horizon, watching sets of waves approaching considering them before they arrive. They use currents to help get them get where they want to go by working with the ocean. Then when the time is right they are poised to stand up, not fighting the wave but becoming one with it.

If we are to handle the big seas of life and in these receive the fullness of life offered we need to learn to be alert, poised and relaxed. Alert to the stable points that orientate us, alert to the waves that are coming our way, alert to the currents beneath the surface. In doing this, when the waves come we can stand up, receive Christ and fullness of life even in raging seas.

How do we do this and live this way? We do this primarily through our prayer life. At the end of the gospel Jesus calls his disciples to be alert, to watch and wait. Our times of prayer, however we do it, are like the surfers bobbing around before the wave comes. Prayer is a time of orientation, alertness and relaxation that allows us to ride the waves when they arrive.

*Dear Lord
through my prayer life
help me to orientate myself to you
paying attention to the waves of life around me.
May this time with you in prayer
help me to stand up
and receive your presence and fullness of life
in the raging oceans of life.
Amen*

Air

What gifts are there in exposure to the wilderness?



Luke 3: 1-6

In the gospel for the second Sunday of Advent we have the word of God through John appearing in the wilderness. Wildernesses are places of exposure to the air, to the extremes of the elements. The sun blazing by day, the cold of night, the wind constantly changing the landscape of the desert, the need to keep moving to find shelter, warmth and food. Life and death are close at hand in wild places.

The wilderness plays a significant role in the story of God's dealing with his people. There is Moses receiving the 10 commandments on Mount Sinai, God's people wandering for 40 years in the desert, and Jesus being driven by the Spirit into the wilderness following his baptism. God meets his people and they are changed in the wilderness. The seeking of wilderness in order to draw close to God, ourselves and others is a tried and tested practice from the Desert Fathers and Mothers to those seeking retreat today. During the wilderness experience of the COVID 19 pandemic we have certainly seen deepening and transformation of prayer, pastoral care and people pausing to reevaluate their lives.

Do you see wilderness experiences as offering you gifts and a place to meet God afresh? In the gospel the call from the wilderness is to make the way possible: to make paths straight, the rough smooth, the high low and the valleys filled. Can you see in your wilderness experiences a deepening of relationships making things possible, opening up new paths, transforming your relationship with self, others and God?

*Dear Lord
Thank you for wild places
Where we can meet ourselves, others and you.
May the wilderness I experience in my life
Be a place of transformation
And growth.
Amen*

Fire

Do we live a life courageously consumed by the fire of love?



Luke 3: 7-18

In the gospel for the third Sunday of Advent John the Baptist, in teaching the people, uses images of fire. Fire has a number of important properties. It is not diminished when shared. Think of a candle being lit from another. The first is not diminished by lighting a second or a third or a fourth and so on and so on. So it is with the economy of love. There is no scarcity or diminishment. Fire also becomes one with that to which it is in contact. The fuel sustains and becomes part of the fire. Finally fire consumes. Things are burnt away only leaving the most robust elements.

Fire speaks profoundly of love. Love is not diminished when shared. There is no scarcity in love. Love becomes part of us and we become loving when exposed to it. Love consumes and refines, burning away all things that are not of love.

Are we courageous enough to let love become one with us, ignite our lives and affect those around us? In the gospel people are coming to John with an understanding of life based on transaction, scarcity, worthiness, privilege and he calls this out. Instead he offers them images of fire and invites them to live lives of love. Dare we ask the question today and everyday, What must I do today to live a life of fiery love?

Dear Lord
May I be ignited by the fire of love
May your love consume me
burning away all that is unloving
May this love
guide my words and actions
so others catch fire.
Amen

Earth

Will we let go and let the world around hold and support us?



Luke 1: 39-56

In the gospel for the fourth Sunday of Advent Mary, pregnant with Jesus, goes to the hill country of Judea to see her cousin Elizabeth who is pregnant with John the Baptist. Mary spends three months with her in the hills. Mary was going through and preparing for a huge change. Often when we are going through a process of change, adaptation or preparation time, simply to be is important. Friendship, shared experience and nature can all support, hold and help us. I wonder how Mary and Elizabeth spent their time together: gardening, going for walks, telling stories, singing, cooking, looking after the animals?

The earth has so much to teach us and we are connected to the natural world in a profound way. Sometimes when life is tough and changing only nature and its love will do. The earth (like a close friend) does not judge, does not ask too much of us, does not want us to be anything we are not. The natural world does not strive to be something it is not and in this it invites us to do the same. To be ourselves, to stop striving and learn to come to ourselves. To be human beings rather than human doings.

Can we honour the earth by receiving from it rather than viewing it as an object to be dominated and used? In the gospel Mary spent an extended time in the hillside of Judea with Elizabeth. What of the earth and natural world nurtures you and calls you to be yourself? How much time do you give to being with this? How are you at stopping and being held and supported by friends, those with shared experience and by the nature.

*Dear Lord
Thank you for the gift of creation
For its support, care and love,
For its invitation to me to be myself and
To stop striving to be something I am not
May I honour your creation by receiving from and caring for it
Amen*