A sermon for the Cathedral Eucharist at Wells Cathedral, preached on Sunday 7 December 2025 by the Reverend Edward Day, Cathedral Curate.

Equity for the Meek of the Earth

If I told you that St John the Baptist was here in Wells, who would you think he is? You might try to think of someone who looks about 2,000 years old. You might try to be clever and say that he is here in the stained-glass windows and on the front of our order of service. Yes, you might be right, but that's not the game. Who would you guess is John the Baptist?

Keep your eyes peeled for someone baptising people in street puddles, someone with lots of hair, someone without their head. That wouldn't narrow it down much in Glastonbury, but what about here in Wells? Is it Len, the recently retired city crier, proclaiming the news? Is it Dan and Darren, the local police officers, telling criminals to repent? Is it simply any man wearing a leather belt?

Or, is it someone here in this Cathedral? The Chapter aren't here this morning, because they're out in parishes around the Diocese, so I can tell you the unrestricted truth about them. What if I told you that the Precentor wears camel hair long johns under his cassock? What if I told you that, whenever we have breakfast, the Dean always serves locusts on toast? What if I told you that the real reason the Bishop keeps bees is to fuel his honey addiction? Now, of course, I would be lying. But who today would be most like St John the Forerunner?

Maybe this is the wrong question, and we should actually turn it on its head? Who is the last person you'd expect to be John the Baptist? The outcast, the voice you don't want to listen to, the marginalised, the person you're a little scared of, the forgotten, the person least like you, the unusual, or you yourself. John the Baptist gives us a vivid example of Advent expectation. To expect to hear good news from the strangest of places. For light to shine out of darkness, for hope to come from despair, joy from sorrow, and to be surprised by the overwhelming love of God's presence.

The example of John the Baptist in Advent teaches us not only to listen for unexpected voices, but it also helps to show us how we ourselves should be forerunners of Christ's equity, equality, and justice. The waiting of Advent is attentive, alert, it leans forward. It is the waiting of people who know that God is on the move. And, in that waiting, we are not invited merely to sit, but we are

invited to become forerunners. To transform the world in anticipation of Christ's coming judgement.

In our reading this morning from the Gospel according to St Matthew, we hear the all-familiar description of John the Baptist's apparent eccentricity. '*John wore clothing made of camel's hair with a leather belt around his waist, and his food was locusts and wild honey*'. This was the man God sent to precede Jesus Christ. The voice from the wilderness. Not something polished. Not something comfortable. Not something that fits neatly into our expectations of righteousness. Yet this is the voice – rough, strange, and unsettling – through whom God chose to speak.

Advent encourages us to listen again for the voices we might not naturally hear, or may not naturally want to hear. '*Repent, for the kingdom is close at hand*' is not an easy message to receive. John the Baptist should make us want to listen to the voices we hear less. To listen to the homeless, prisoners, those living with addiction. To listen to the voices of women that our patriarchal society mutes. To listen to the wisdom and experience of other ethnicities and nationalities. To seek the perspective of those who experience the world in a different way; the young, those with gender dysphoria, the disabled, those whose socio-economic reality differs from our own.

Searching ourselves and seeking repentance, we ought to ask some challenging questions. If John the Baptist were to stride along our High Street today, dusty and dishevelled, would we listen? If the voice crying out in the wilderness was a woman, would we listen? If the forerunner was black, would we listen? If the prophet lived in a council estate, would we listen? Because the truth is, these are our divisions. We made them. For God has never been bound by our categories and Our Lord did not select only those we would find comfortable as His messengers.

Christ is our ultimate judge. It is His justice that we crave. For in Christ there is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female. Christ is not the judge of fear and trembling, but the judge whose justice is shaped by mercy, whose justice lifts up the lowly and restores the broken-hearted, whose justice reveals every human being as a fellow-heir of God's salvation.

Christ's equity and justice is not merely a distant hope. It is an invitation to live differently now. Like John the Baptist, we are invited to become forerunners, preparing the way of the Lord. Not just with our words but with the way we shape our lives and how we transform our world.

In Isaiah, an unbelievable picture of unity and peace in Christ's justice is painted. With Jesus Christ, the Root of Jesse, there is no division or enmity. As we read,

'the wolf shall live with the lamb, the leopard shall lie down with the kid, the calf and the lion and the fatling together, and a little child shall lead them. The cow and the bear shall graze, their young shall lie down together; and the lion shall eat straw like the ox. The nursing child shall play over the hole of the asp, and the weaned child shall put its hand on the adder's den'.

Searching for John the Baptist in our world, let us find his mission within our own hearts. In this perpetual season of Advent that we find ourselves in, awaiting Christ's Second Coming, let us all be forerunners who are watchful and willing. Watchful for the voices from the wilderness through whom God's love may be known. And willing to be forerunners of Christ's justice; to repent, re-imagine, and embody a Gospel that shatters all divisions.

When Christ comes again as judge, may He find us expectant and awake; ready to greet Him with joyful love and firm faith.

The Reverend Edward Day, Cathedral Curate 7 December 2025