

Friends

The well-driven path from St. Andrew's Methodist Church to the manse let me down this evening and I got all the way to The Crooked Billet roundabout on the way to Iver before I could correct myself. The road works that have been there for the last three years have suddenly gone. They had become a sub-conscious landmark, and without them, I took a wrong turning and ended up in an unfamiliar one way system and then on a fast dual carriageway and there I was committed to a path I did not wish to take and forced to continue until an appropriate stopping point when I could get my phone out of the boot, ask Google maps to tell me the way home and turn around.

The Jewish people were in a similar position when Jesus was born. They knew about God and they had their well-worn, well-known paths to him that involved following the law and making the appropriate sacrifices. But over the years they had taken a wrong pathway and now they were stuck in a dry, legalistic faith that was practised by the priests and the Pharisees and that was often inaccessible, particularly to the poor. It was not a way of following God that spoke of hope or love, and neither were their lives, lived under Roman occupation, safe or secure.

Into this situation came John the Baptist. And like my Google maps told me when I was lost, he told them to turn around, which is the true meaning of the word "repent". John was the one of whom it was foretold that he would "make straight in the desert a highway for our God" and the one who would proclaim the coming of Jesus.

This Advent, I wonder where we are on the road. It is easy to think that we are going in the right direction on the right path. We know the way, we have been walking in it for a long time. But have we accidentally gone charging off in the wrong direction - not exactly lost, but not turned towards Jesus? Are we struggling to find a safe place to stop on the road and just check the map? Advent offers us an opportunity to think about where we are on our discipleship journey, how aligned we are with God. When I got to the Crooked Billet roundabout, there was a petrol station. It was the work of minutes to stop safely,

get out my phone, and ascertain the correct direction. Let's take time this Advent to pull out of the traffic and check in with ourselves and God, lest we too be driving in the wrong direction.

God bless, Vicci