Second Sunday of Advent (C) 2018

The prophet Baruch proclaims good news and this is taken up by John the Baptist. ‘Every valley shall be filled in, and every hill be laid low’. I was discussing this with Year 2 in St Patrick’s. And we decided that this would indeed be good news for cyclists - but not good news for the Lake District and all its climbing shops!

It is hard for us to understand why a flat landscape should be considered a good thing. We need to put our minds back only a couple of hundred years - before people started to see, for example, the Lake District as a beautiful, romantic place. Before that it was considered dangerous - where all sorts of violence might lurk hidden away. This was the view in the ancient world - valleys and hills can hide robbers and invading armies. The prophet Baruch, echoed by John the Baptist are speaking of a time when no dangers will lurk; where there will be no hidden things to fear - when the peace, and hope and justice that Jesus comes to bring will be the rule not the exception.

The children have been learning about a very new saint - St Oscar Romero - who was gunned down while saying mass. He was archbishop of San Salvador, outspoken in his defence of his people who had been robbed of so many of their human rights and treated with such violence. Oscar Romero was trying to create a world more like that proclaimed by Baruch and John the Baptist. He suffered the fate of John the Baptist - he suffered the fate of Our Lord - which is why he is now proclaimed a saint and martyr.

The Advent message, which we know gets drowned out by Christmas preparations, still needs to be heard. That hope needs to be experienced again - it is not extinguished by the men of violence, by the dangers that lie hidden in our world. It is the hope that Jesus embodies. Hope that, despite the darkness, light will triumph.

An Advent task for us will be - not to get out the earth diggers and reform the landscape - but to work for justice, for the alleviation of poverty and pain. Our task is to be the hope-bringers, the peace makers. Heralds of our loving Lord - whose birth we shall celebrate at Christmas.