

[Isaiah 61:1-2, 10-11, 1 Thessalonians 5:16-24, John 1:6-8, 19-28]

Last Friday was a memorable day for Farhad Bandesh. Not only was it his 40th birthday; it was also the day he was released after seven years in prison. He had not been jailed for any crime, but for fleeing from Kurdistan to save his life, then asking Australia to protect him. For 28 years now, Australian governments have been calling refugees like Farhad ‘illegals’; but it is our government



that has been acting illegally, keeping many innocent people locked up for years, indefinitely, seriously damaging their physical and mental health. This goes against the 1951 Refugee Convention, which is based on the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

Farhad Bandesh’s patient waiting, and his joy at being released, illustrate powerfully what Advent is about for **all** of us. When we look at our human race from the widest perspective, seeing the biggest picture, we see billions of people, through the ages, striving to be happy. We know how hard it is to build ourselves an oasis of security and comfort; a home to shelter our families. We know how temporary are our years of youth; how fragile is our health. When our youth or health come to an end, or are even put at risk, we quickly reach a point where we might be tempted to give up, asking ‘what’s the use?’ We might even give in to despair.

Here in Australia we live in a bubble of prosperity, with an excellent medical safety-net and government pensions. These are not perfect, but they are more than most countries have. As for ‘security’, we have a police force which is less corrupt than many others. But the whole human race, struggling to achieve happiness through the centuries, is just a tiny island within the universe of 100’s of billions of galaxies.

That is why it is marvellous to hear these Advent readings reminding us, powerfully, that the mysterious Creator of it all, God, is **helping** us. Prophets like Isaiah, 2700 years ago, kept coming out with the messages like: ‘God... has **sent** me to bring the **good news to the poor**... to proclaim **liberty** to captives...’ The constant theme of **all** the Bible is that the poorest of people are being cared for; the most desperate will be fulfilled in the end. And we learn, just a little, about the mysterious Being, God who is doing this.

God, who made us, is passionate that as the human race grows towards maturity, that justice be done – eventually – for everyone, especially those who suffer, like Farhad and millions of other homeless refugees. And the Bible tells us, yes, that God **loves us**, intimately.

It was no coincidence that the prophet John the Baptist, centuries after Isaiah, also said he was **sent**: to announce the coming of One still greater. The unseen God, whom we are slowly learning more about, is trying constantly to ‘get through’ to us.

It was no coincidence that Jesus quoted these same words of Isaiah when he began *his* public mission in Galilee. From the beginning of the human race, the same God has been *inspiring* – putting God’s Spirit into – people whose hearts are ready to welcome God, and tell others about God.

This Advent, what will we do? Will we just shrug off these familiar readings, or will we listen more keenly than before? St Paul tells us again, in the second reading, that God helps the poor – and we are all ‘poor’ when we come up against life’s various limits. Paul also tells us that God’s own Spirit comes **into** each of us; and is – even though we sometimes think we are failures – is working to make us ‘perfect and holy’. We hear again each Advent, that we have been freed!