

1<sup>st</sup> Sunday in Advent  
Sunday 3<sup>rd</sup> December 2017

Let's pray: God of the humble, God of the poor, God who turns the world upside down soften our hearts that we may be turned upside down by your word today and every day. Amen

Are you ready, Are you ready? Are you ready? How about you at the back are you ready?

Ready for what?

Well ready for Christmas surely!!

But wait a minute it's only the 3<sup>rd</sup> of December, it's the 1<sup>st</sup> Sunday of Advent - but isn't that just a preparation time for the big day, time to rush round and buy presents, buy food, tons of it, panic about who to ask for Christmas Dinner and who not??

Well no, Advent is nothing to do with all that, Advent is a time of waiting,

"In those days...." So begins our entry into the Season of Advent. It sounds ominous and it is. Advent is not just a liturgical season of the church year. It is a reality of life. It happens in all sorts of ways. It comes at various points in life, not just the four or five weeks before Christmas.

"In those days ... the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will be falling from heaven, and the powers in the heavens will be shaken." These are Jesus words to his disciples. The disciples have been admiring the temple and the large stones. They are impressed. Jesus, however, is telling them that change is coming. The temple of their life is coming down.

If you have ever experienced significant change in your life, whether desired or dreaded, you know about "those days." You know about Advent. You know what it is like to enter the darkness of change. All change, whether welcome or unwanted, brings some kind of loss. It may be the loss of a relationship, the loss of a loved one, the loss of what is comfortable, familiar, safe. Regardless, the world as we have known it has ended.

The Advents of our lives set before us important questions. How will we find our way forward when the usual lights that illumined our path no longer shine? What do we do when it feels as if our world is falling apart? Where do we go when it seems as if darkness is our only companion and God is no where to be seen?

The dark times of life are threshold moments. The temptation is to do something; to fix it, to ease the

pain, to escape the uncertainty, and to get back to what used to be.

The God of Advent does not allow that.

We can never go back to the way it was before the lights went out.

God does not undo our life.

God redeems our life.

Advent is not so much about the losses as it is about the hope and coming of what will be. That hope and coming is the Son of Man, Jesus, the Christ. The presence of Christ is the ultimate answer to every prayer, to every light extinguishing loss, to every Advent of our life.

Every time we tell the Advent story of our life we echo the prophet Isaiah's cry, "O that you would tear open the heavens and come down" (Is. 64:1). How many times have you felt like screaming at God, *'I can no longer deal with this, come and sort it out!!!!'*

And God does. God is faithful. God strengthens us to the end. In the midst of our losses we lack nothing as we await the revealing of Lord Jesus Christ. (1 Cor. 1:7-9).

The Advent times of life are times of waiting. They are palpable times. In Advent we live in between what was and what will be. We are neither here nor there. We are betwixt and between. They are times of

transition and it is hard, sometimes even impossible, to see the way forward.

If we allow them to the dark threshold places of life can draw us closer to Jesus. They remind us that we do not know everything. We do not see all possibilities. We can neither predict nor control anything. We are not in charge.

Advent challenges us to give up our usual sources of illumination, to let go of our habitual ways of knowing, and to question our typical ways of seeing. Advent invites us to receive the God who comes to us in the darkness of life.

At some point our world falls apart, life changes, or the lights go out. More often than not we see this as the end. When these things happen, Jesus says, remember the fig tree. Read the signs correctly. When its branch becomes tender and it puts forth leaves you know summer is near. So also when the darkness overtakes your life know that the Son of Man is near. Christ's presence, our healing, and salvation, are always taking place in the dark and messy parts of life. We have not and never will be abandoned to the darkness.

"Be alert," Jesus warns. He commands us to "Keep awake." Darkness is not our enemy as much as is

falling asleep. We fall asleep whenever fear controls or life, when hope gives way to despair, when busyness is equated with goodness, when entitlement replaces thanksgiving, when we choose what is comfortable rather than life-giving. Whenever we think our life is over, that darkness is our final reality, that we have been abandoned, or that loss and darkness are our only reality then we have fallen asleep.

Too often we allow the darkness to deceive us into believing there is nothing worth waiting or watching for. So we close our eyes. We fall asleep and we become part of the darkness. We refuse to see the One who is always coming to us. The danger in the darkness is that we do not give our eyes time to adjust. We do not trust our night vision. Night vision is not about the light around us but the light that is within us, a light that can never be extinguished.

Let me ask you a question – do you believe that Jesus will come again to this earth? – not as a baby but as our glorious triumphant King and Saviour?

Every week we stand and say in the Creed, ‘He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead, and his kingdom will have no end.’

Do we believe that? I do. I remember as a very small child in this church with my mum recently widowed

reciting the Creed then asking mum the meaning of the phrase *We look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come.*

She replied that it meant we would see my daddy again when Jesus came back – I’ve held onto that for 60 years.

Advent is a wake up call, we have a choice to make, are we sheep who follow the great Shepherd, or will we be goats to whom that Great Shepherd will say - I never knew you! Are we wise virgins or foolish virgins?

We must understand that we are not citizens of this world, that our God is the answer to all of our problems and those of the world rather than Political solutions - these are not the answers to our world’s problems; it is deciding whose side you are on – God’s or the Devil – the man of Lawlessness – and his effect is being seen right across the globe – when people put themselves first and God second, third or last, then the devil has a foothold in our lives – self seeking, pride, self righteousness all come to the fore, while love, compassion are trodden down. There is no love or compassion in terrorists – they are self seeking and self serving - they have been lied to, indoctrinated and in part are to be pitied, for they are

not living the life that God intended for them. Neither are their victims.

Following and trusting in God means living a life expectant and hopeful for Christ's return.

Discipleship calls for a faith in which ultimately, despite our present struggle, God's love is sovereign. We are called to manage our lives and conform them to God's vision of justice, love and peace.

The faithful Christian response to disaster is not pointing a finger, or making shocking headline-grabbing accusations, but service to God and our neighbour .

Jesus warns his disciples against trusting in the security of the Temple.

\* He cautions against leaders with empty promises.

\* When the world is falling apart around them, he offers hope to those who trust him.

Our readings this morning from Isaiah and Mark 13 encourage believers to keep the faith in testing circumstances. At the heart of their confidence is God's faithfulness, *' O look upon us we pray for we are all your people.'*

The temple was more than just an extraordinary piece of architecture. In the mind of the people it was the only place where heaven and earth met, where the Holy consecrated the profane, where the presence

of God hidden behind a curtain kept watch over Israel. The temple had become more important to the faith than the One it was built to house and so Jesus directed the disciple to look more closely. Do we do that? Do we think more of the fabric of this lovely building than of the people who do not yet know Christ who walk the pavements outside these walls?

Do you see what God is doing in your life, in the life of the world? Are you ready?

Jesus was ready – He gave His life in exchange for ours, so that we can deepen our relationship with His Father and live life eternally – are we ready ?

Where those people who died recently in the submarine sinking off Argentina this last week spiritually prepared - had they accepted Jesus' death in place of their final death at His second coming? Have we?

Have we fully committed our lives and wills to Him? Do we share the amazing news of His resurrection with our friends and neighbours as readily as we may tell them excitedly about a new film or holiday destination?

Are we ready to give Him and ourselves time in each other's presence – learning to listen , to hear the quiet voice of the Holy Spirit , then following His guidance in all that we do?

Which in turn leads to living a life expectant and hopeful for Christ's return; while discipleship calls for a faith in which ultimately, despite our present struggle, God's love is sovereign. we are called to manage our lives and conform them to God's vision of justice, love and peace.

Ultimately it is up to us to be ready, so that if the unexpected happens, and our lives are cut short, by death or Christ's return, we will be acceptable to our Heavenly Father – not many people know when their lives will end – I suspect many do not have the luxury of being primed, ready to go!

Wake up - we are, each one of us, *'God's special possession, that we may declare the praises of him who called us out of darkness into his wonderful light.'* —1 Peter 2:9

The walls of our comfort zone are tumbling down are we totally focussed on Him? - if IS terrorists stormed through the church door now, is your heart and life prepared Are you ready?

In this time of Advent may each one of us -

Be still. Be quiet. Listen. Wait. Watch.

These are the practices of Advent. Why? Because God “works for those who wait for him” (Is. 64:4)