

Sunday 28<sup>th</sup> November 2021

First Sunday of Advent

**Luke 21:25-36**

25 'There will be signs in the sun, the moon, and the stars, and on the earth distress among nations confused by the roaring of the sea and the waves. 26 People will faint from fear and foreboding of what is coming upon the world, for the powers of the heavens will be shaken. 27 Then they will see "the Son of Man coming in a cloud" with power and great glory. 28 Now when these things begin to take place, stand up and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near.'

29 Then he told them a parable: 'Look at the fig tree and all the trees; 30 as soon as they sprout leaves you can see for yourselves and know that summer is already near. 31 So also, when you see these things taking place, you know that the kingdom of God is near. 32 Truly I tell you, this generation will not pass away until all things have taken place. 33 Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.'

34 'Be on guard so that your hearts are not weighed down with dissipation and drunkenness and the worries of this life, and that day does not catch you unexpectedly, 35 like a trap. For it will come upon all who live on the face of the whole earth. 36 Be alert at all times, praying that you may have the strength to escape all these things that will take place, and to stand before the Son of Man.'

[NRSV]

**Other Readings:**        **Jeremiah 33:14-16, Psalm 25:1-9, 1 Thessalonians 3:9-end**

**Homily**

"There will be signs in the sun, the moon, and the stars, and on the earth distress among nations confused by the roaring of the sea and the waves." It is hard not to think that these words may have a particularly sharp prophetic edge for us at the moment as we are becoming more and more aware of the urgency of the climate change situation and we wait perhaps with anxiety, perhaps with hope for the outworkings of the COP 26 climate conference and for the nations of the world to work together to mitigate the issues and implement better stewardship of our environment leaving a more hopeful and sustainable legacy to the children, grandchildren and great grandchildren of the current world's population.

But we have to be careful when reading apocalyptic writings in the Bible like these words from Luke. Careful for two reasons: firstly because using such writings to predict the future is fraught with the dangers of misinterpretation and using a particular passage to prove a point we want to make rather than seeking the wisdom of God and secondly because we can get so put off by the alarming imagery in such passages that we miss other things in the passage worthy of consideration.

So, with these rather alarming and apocalyptic words we come to the start of Advent, the start of the Church's year. This passage is also a timely reminder that Advent is a time of seeking for signs of God's coming and signs of fresh outbursts of God's Kingdom. Luke's passage as well as sounding a warning note, urges us to be alert. Just as we must be alert to what is happening in the world around us, we need also to be alert to the signs of God's presence and to his voice - whether that comes to us as an apocalyptic style shout or perhaps more often as a whisper that we have to tune in to and listen to carefully.

When the fig tree sprouts, Summer is drawing near, when the days lengthen and darken the signs of the season of Advent remind us that Christ's coming draws near once again and once again we are invited to be attentive, to be alert, not to let this season of preparation pass us by. Our Advent readings and liturgies, the gradual lighting week by week of the Advent wreath invite us to pay attention, to make a space amidst the ever-lengthening commercial season of Christmas to prepare our hearts and minds to celebrate Christ's coming. This is not always easy, but it is worth it and it is possible. We can make our Christmas preparations and join in the festivities that take place before Christmas whilst still making a little time to contemplate Advent themes of waiting, hoping and preparing.

There are a wealth of resources out there to celebrate Advent and they are well worth searching out and exploring but just as it is easy to be overwhelmed by the preparations for Christmas we can get overwhelmed by daily Advent readings as just one more thing on the to do list. It can be simpler – we can take some time maybe once a week during Advent to reflect on one of the Bible passages from the preceding or the upcoming Sunday, or maybe to read prayerfully through the Advent collect. Or even just take 5 minutes out to take a breath, to still your mind and spend some time resting in the presence of God.

Intentionally making a little space to observe Advent seems particularly appropriate this year. We aren't at the end of the pandemic but we are perhaps at the beginning of the end and starting to look together to what the future and new opportunities might look like in a world that has been changed but still offers possibility:

- the possibility to welcome Christ more deeply into our lives to begin after a long period punctuated by periods of isolation and introspection to look outwards and respond once again to God's call to be light in what can be a dark world.
- the possibility to contemplate anew the depth of love God has for each one of us, love made incarnate in the birth we are preparing our hearts and minds to celebrate once again.

### **Conversation Questions**

1. Have you given any thought to how you might make a little time and space to observe the season of Advent this year?
2. What signs of God's Kingdom are you aware of around you?

3. Might you take some time this week to consider what God might be particularly calling your attention to at this time?
4. Is there anything else from the passage that speaks to you not already discussed? What is it?
5. What will you do this week in your Monday-to-Saturday ministry in response to what you have heard today? #everydayfaith

### **Prayer**

Spend some time in silence, responding to what you have heard today and listening to what God might be saying to you.

### **Collect of the day**

Almighty God,  
give us grace to cast away the works of darkness  
and to put on the armour of light,  
now in the time of this mortal life,  
in which your Son Jesus Christ came to us in great humility;  
that on the last day,  
when he shall come again in his glorious majesty  
to judge the living and the dead,  
we may rise to the life immortal;  
through him who is alive and reigns with you,  
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,  
one God, now and for ever.

### **Alternative Collect**

Almighty God,  
as your kingdom dawns,  
turn us from the darkness of sin  
to the light of holiness,  
that we may be ready to meet you  
in our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ.

Common Worship: Services and Prayers for the Church of England, material from which is incorporated in this service paper, is copyright © The Archbishops' Council, 2000. Scripture passage from the New Revised Standard Version (Anglicised) copyright © 1989, 1995 the Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America. Used by permission. All rights reserved.