

Service of Morning Worship –Sunday 29th November 2020

Advent 1.

Introduction

Grace and peace to us from God.
May he fill us with truth and joy.

We pray together:

Loving Lord,
fill us with your life-giving, joy-giving, peace-giving presence,
that we may praise you now with our lips, in our hearts
and all day long with our lives,
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Prayer of Preparation

Almighty God, to whom all hearts are open,
all desires known and from whom no secrets are hidden:
cleanse the thoughts of our hearts
by the inspiration of your Holy Spirit,
that we may perfectly love you,
and worthily magnify your holy name;
through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Confession

The word of God is living and active. It judges the thoughts and intentions of the heart.
All is laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we give account. And so, we confess our
sins in penitence and faith, thankful of the assurance of God's forgiveness.

Our God, for love of you we desire to hate and forsake all sins
by which we have ever displeased you;
and we resolve by the help of your grace
to commit them no more;
and to avoid all opportunities of sin.
Help us to do this, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

May God who loved the world so much that he sent his Son to be our Saviour
forgive us our sins and make us holy to serve him in the world, through Jesus Christ our
Lord. Amen.



Readings

Mark 24: 24-end

“But in those days, following that distress,

“the sun will be darkened,
and the moon will not give its light;
the stars will fall from the sky,
and the heavenly bodies will be shaken.’

“At that time people will see the Son of Man coming in clouds with great power and glory. And he will send his angels and gather his elect from the four winds, from the ends of the earth to the ends of the heavens.

“Now learn this lesson from the fig tree: As soon as its twigs get tender and its leaves come out, you know that summer is near. Even so, when you see these things happening, you know that it is near, right at the door. Truly I tell you; this generation will certainly not pass away until all these things have happened. Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away.

“But about that day or hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. Be on guard! Be alert! You do not know when that time will come. It’s like a man going away: He leaves his house and puts his servants in charge, each with their assigned task, and tells the one at the door to keep watch.

“Therefore keep watch because you do not know when the owner of the house will come back—whether in the evening, or at midnight, or when the rooster crows, or at dawn. If he comes suddenly, do not let him find you sleeping. What I say to you, I say to everyone: ‘Watch!’”

Sermon

Today is the first Sunday of Advent.

I’m not sure many people who don’t go to church know very much about Advent – even though you can now buy Advent calendars (and candles) in all sorts of shops.

Usually these calendars have absolutely nothing to do with the Christian concept of Advent. By that I mean that when you open the doors there’s no telling of the Christmas story a little bit each day in words and pictures: instead there’s usually a picture of a Christmas decoration and a piece of chocolate.....and I wouldn’t be surprised if it’s now the case that if there’s no chocolate the kids aren’t really interested!

As with so many seasons in the Christian calendar, the secular world has high-jacked Advent as a vehicle for making money.

So, what is Advent all about?

I know that there will be some of you watching who can answer that question easily but for



those of you who aren't sure let's put you in the 'know'.

The word 'Advent' means 'arrival'; or 'an appearing'; or 'coming into place'.

The season consists of 4 Sundays, beginning on the 4th Sunday before Christmas or the nearest Sunday to November 30th. It ends on Christmas Eve and so we need to remember that Advent is not part of the Christmas season – it's separate from it.

It marks the commemoration of Christ's first coming, which we celebrate on Christmas Day, and looks with anticipation towards his second coming – which we've been focusing on in the lead up to Advent.

The Advent season is sometimes viewed as 'Little Lent' because many churches often focus on prayer and penitence during these weeks: a time to prepare our hearts for both Christmas and the eventual return of Christ and the judgement he will bring to the world.

Our reading today again gives us a glimpse of how it will be when Jesus returns: and the description here is actually quite unsettling.

The sun will be darkened; the moon won't shed any light; the stars are going to fall from the sky; and the heavenly bodies will be shaken. In other words, all those natural phenomena which we consider to be constant and dependable and can all see wherever we are in the world will be very much in disarray!

Again, we're reminded that the Son of Man (Jesus) is coming in clouds in glory, as we've already heard on previous Sundays, but another detail is added. He will come with great power!! So, I don't think that this will somehow be a quiet affair!

And then in verse 31 Jesus declares that 'heaven and earth will pass away'. So literally the ground beneath our feet is going to be ripped away!

What will we be able to stand on when that day comes?

Answer?

God's word; Jesus says that his words will never pass away. The earth can disintegrate around us but the truth of the words of Jesus will never be changed or abolished.

The beginning of John's Gospel tells us, in a roundabout way, that the Word is Jesus Christ. Jesus and his word provide us with the only concrete, firm stability in our unstable world.

I find it very sad that many people who profess to be Christians often don't make any effort to read God's word regularly, if at all. How then can we be properly safe and secure at the end of time if we don't have the foundation of God's word in our lives? It's interesting isn't it that Jesus says that even he doesn't know the time of the end – only the Father knows. How can that be when he also says that he and the Father are one?

Well, basically, because when Jesus became a man, fully human, he voluntarily gave up the unlimited use of his divine attributes for the period of time he walked the earth in human



form. The emphasis here isn't on Jesus' lack of knowledge but rather on the fact that no-one knows. It is God the Father's secret to be revealed when he decides. Jesus wants us to concentrate on the preparation needed to be made for the momentous day, not trying to calculate when it will be.

And the concept of preparation isn't something that we aren't familiar with. Months of planning go into a wedding, the birth of a baby, a career change, buying a home.....and that's as it should be. These events are important and usually life changing.

But how many of us place the same importance on preparing for Christ's return? This will top all other events in our lives for importance because its result will last for eternity!

The truth is that we neglect preparing for 'the day of the Lord' at our peril. Postponing our preparations is risky and dangerous because, unlike a date for a wedding for example, we have no idea when it will happen.

Last week a lady, who was preparing her garden for Christmas, was interviewed on the news. She was arranging all sorts of paraphernalia around the space. Nothing wrong with that I guess: but during the interview her whole focus for Christmas was about being with family – getting together with family and friends; and how the pandemic has interfered with that happening.

And, if you've got a family who get on with each other it can be a great time. Not so good for those who are isolated and alone, ostracised from their families or even friendless.

But I wanted to say to her that she was kind of missing the point.

The very word Christmas includes Christ; and if he hadn't come to earth the first time, we wouldn't be panicking about family get togethers, because Christmas wouldn't exist.

This lady's focus for Christmas excluded Christ completely.....as is the case with so many other people.

If people ignore the first coming of Jesus, which has proved to be a fact, and make no preparations to commemorate it, I feel it's highly unlikely that they will be preparing for his second coming.

My question for us today is, 'how much do we, as Christians, revere Christ's birth more than the tree and the turkey and buying presents?' Whether we are with family or not Christ will be among us if we invite him, pandemic or not, and he should be our first priority.

And when the Christmas season is over will we be continuing the preparations in our lives for his second coming?

Jesus says to everyone 'Keep watch!' because he's coming.



Creed

Let us declare our faith in God:

We believe in God the Father, from whom every family in heaven and earth is named.

We believe in God the Son, who lives in our hearts through faith, and fills us with his love.

We believe in God the Holy Spirit, who strengthens us with power from on high.

**We believe in one God;
Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.**

Intercessions

Advent 1

Lord Christ, we look to your coming again.

Come among us with mercy and judgement.

When you come may we be found prepared and ready to greet you with faith and hope.

May we be found standing firmly on your word so that we will not fall away.

Set the heart of your Church everywhere on your redeeming presence; and give us boldness, courage and stout hearts to inform people of your second coming and of the need to prepare for this future, literally world-shattering event!

Lord in your mercy, Hear our Prayer

Lord Christ, we look to your coming again.

Come among the nations with mercy and judgement.

Keep all those in government alert to your justice and peace: and in silence we remember those places around the world where governments blatantly abuse and exploit the people they should be caring for.....

Expand their vision to incorporate the fact that what they do now with their power, and how they treat their people, will have eternal consequences: and bring about Godly change to their rule.

Lord in your mercy, Hear our Prayer

Lord Christ, we look to your coming again.

Come among our communities and homes with mercy and judgement.

We pray for those who live around our church for whom Christmas, and the preparations for it, are never a source of joy or excitement: for those for whom Christmas reminds them of the loss of a loved one: for those for whom Christmas Day is just another day battling with addiction or poverty.



For all of these may this Christmas bring about a change in their circumstances because they finally have an encounter with you which changes their lives for good for ever.

Lord in your mercy, Hear our Prayer

Lord Christ, we look for your coming again.

Come among all who are ill with mercy and judgement.

Many are known to us personally and we make space and silence to name them before your bounteous Throne of Grace.....Strengthen and hold them in the palm of your hand. Pour out you healing upon them in abundance. Bring them inner peace and calm as they persevere with their conditions. And bring them into the everlasting light of your salvation.

**Merciful Father, accept these prayers for the sake of your Son, our Saviour, Jesus Christ.
Amen**

Let us now continue in prayer using the words our Saviour taught us:

**Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come,
your will be done,
on earth as in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our sins
as we forgive those who sin against us.
Lead us not into temptation
but deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the power,
and the glory are yours
now and for ever. Amen.**

Blessing

**Go in peace to love and serve the Lord
In the name of Christ. Amen.**

