



SUNDAY 29th November – Advent I

Hymn

1 LO! he comes with clouds
descending,
Once for favoured sinners slain;
Thousand thousand saints attending
Swell the triumph of his train:
Alleluya!
God appears, on earth to reign.

2 Every eye shall now behold him
Robed in dreadful majesty;
Those who set at nought and sold
him,
Pierced and nailed him to the tree,
Deeply wailing
Shall the true Messiah see.

3 Those dear tokens of his passion
Still his dazzling body bears,
Cause of endless exultation
To his ransomed worshippers:
With what rapture
Gaze we on those glorious scars!

4 Yea, Amen! let all adore thee,
High on thine eternal throne;
Saviour, take the power and glory:
Claim the kingdom for thine own:
O come quickly!
Alleluya! Come, Lord, come!

Opening Words and Advent Candle Lighting

**Blessed are you, sovereign Lord, God of our ancestors:
to you be praise and glory for ever.
You called the patriarchs to live by the light of faith
and to journey in the hope of your promised fulfilment.
May we be obedient to your call
and be ready and watchful to receive your Christ,
a lamp to our feet and a light to our path;
for you are our light and our salvation. Amen.**

Among the poor,
among the proud,
among the persecuted,
among the privileged,



Christ is coming to make all things new.

In the private house,
in the public place,
in the wedding feast,
in the judgement hall,

Christ is coming to make all things new.

With a gentle touch,
with an angry word,
with a clear conscience,
with a burning love,

Christ is coming to make all things new.

That the kingdom might come,
that the world might believe,
that the powerful might stumble,
that the hidden might be seen,

Christ is coming to make all things new.

Within us, without us,
behind us, before us,
in this place, in every place,
for this time, for all time,

Christ is coming to make all things new.

Confession

When the Lord comes,
he will bring to light the things now hidden in darkness,
and will disclose the purposes of the heart.
Therefore in the light of Christ let us confess our sins.

Heavenly Father, you have created a universe of light:
forgive us when we return to darkness.
Lord, have mercy. **Lord, have mercy.**

Lord Jesus, you are the light of the world:
cleanse and heal our blinded sight.
Christ, have mercy. **Christ, have mercy.**

Holy Spirit, you give us light in our hearts:



renew us in faith and love.
Lord, have mercy. **Lord, have mercy.**

Readings

Read by Ann Griffiths, Caldecote

Isaiah 64.1-9

O that you would tear open the heavens and come down,
so that the mountains would quake at your presence—
as when fire kindles brushwood
and the fire causes water to boil—
to make your name known to your adversaries,
so that the nations might tremble at your presence!
When you did awesome deeds that we did not expect,
you came down, the mountains quaked at your presence.
From ages past no one has heard,
no ear has perceived,
no eye has seen any God besides you,
who works for those who wait for him.
You meet those who gladly do right,
those who remember you in your ways.
But you were angry, and we sinned;
because you hid yourself we transgressed.
We have all become like one who is unclean,
and all our righteous deeds are like a filthy cloth.
We all fade like a leaf,
and our iniquities, like the wind, take us away.
There is no one who calls on your name,
or attempts to take hold of you;
for you have hidden your face from us,
and have delivered us into the hand of our iniquity.
Yet, O LORD, you are our Father;
we are the clay, and you are our potter;
we are all the work of your hand.
Do not be exceedingly angry, O LORD,
and do not remember iniquity for ever.
Now consider, we are all your people.

Mark 13.24-37



‘But in those days, after that suffering,

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.

Then they will see “the Son of Man coming in clouds” with great power and glory. Then he will send out the angels, and gather his elect from the four winds, from the ends of the earth to the ends of heaven.

‘From the fig tree learn its lesson: as soon as its branch becomes tender and puts forth its leaves, you know that summer is near. So also, when you see these things taking place, you know that he is near, at the very gates. Truly I tell you, this generation will not pass away until all these things have taken place. Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.

‘But about that day or hour no one knows, neither the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. Beware, keep alert; for you do not know when the time will come. It is like a man going on a journey, when he leaves home and puts his slaves in charge, each with his work, and commands the doorkeeper to be on the watch. Therefore, keep awake—for you do not know when the master of the house will come, in the evening, or at midnight, or at cockcrow, or at dawn, or else he may find you asleep when he comes suddenly. And what I say to you I say to all: Keep awake.’

Reflection

Written by the Rev'd David Newton

Last week I met – via zoom – with my Spiritual Director. This is someone who asks me probing questions about my walk with the Lord. Most clergy have someone like this whom they meet with. We get together once every couple of months; he is skilled in what he does, and I am blessed by his gentle quiet listening and questioning.

This time, towards the end of the session he asked one of those questions – as he does – that caught me off guard and that needed pondering, the kind of question that spiritual direction is all about. He asked what impact the last 8 months had had on me; what it had ‘done’ to me *within*.

Now, I had spent plenty of time being asked by people what I had learnt, or what was good in all this, or what good could grow out of this time. But no



one had gone so directly for the heart and asked, what's been going on *inside* during all this?

I'm ashamed to admit that I hadn't given it that much thought. I had instead just been 'getting on' or perhaps more accurately, 'getting by'.

I said I'd have to have a ponder and chew it over, which is what I've been doing ever since. More on that later.

Today marks the beginning of the season of Advent, the beginning of the church year, which looks to Christ's coming at Christmas, as well as to his second coming in glory. However we might interpret such an idea as 'the second coming' (and there are some fairly extraordinary sci-fi type interpretations out there) at its heart, it is all about judgement.

By judgement I do not mean something connected with fire and brimstone, with punishment and an angry God. Instead judgement is about revealing things as they really are.

A food critic makes a judgement about how good a chef's cooking is – they reveal (in their own limited way) what they 'see' that is good in a dish and what is bad in it. They draw out the subtleties of flavour and texture that my palate might have missed. They attempt to show everyone else the 'reality' of this dish – perhaps hidden behind trendy décor and fancy presentation.

The Judgement of Christ then is about this showing of things as they really are. We can think of this judgement in two ways.

First, we can – and must – in some sense think of a 'final' judgement. 'He will come again to judge the quick and the dead' we say in our creed. There will come a day when everything will be laid bare before the Love of God. For some that Love might burn like a roaring flame, whilst for others it might console like a gentle fire in the hearth. To think of future judgement is to hold on to the possibility of hope – that evil will be 'burnt up' and all things restored in the life of God.

But second, we can – and must – also think about this judgement as happening here and now. We can – and I think must – think of 'the second coming' not just as a future event, but something that happens in our hearts and in our lives as we continuously open ourselves up to God's Judgement.

So we pray – especially at this time of year – tear open the heavens and come down (as our Isaiah reading starts). Traditionally every, advent service started



with these words. It is a prayer orientated towards the future yes, but also a prayer for now – that God might come down upon us in judgement *now*.

It is a prayer that his Love would help us to see ourselves and the world around us, as it really is; it is a prayer that our eyes would be opened. And, going a bit further, it is a prayer that God's Love would burn up the chaff within and kindle whatever goodness there is instead. Or, in the words from Isaiah, that we might allow ourselves to become clay in the potter's hand to be shaped and moulded and remade. That is what judgement is all about. That is what the Coming of Christ on the clouds in power and glory – in this moment – is all about.

Which brings us back to the question from my Spiritual Director. What impact has the last 8 months had on me... what's been going on *within*? To be honest, as soon as he asked I was pretty sure of the answer, but I didn't like the answer very much so I hedged around it. So let's cut to the chase now: it's made me grumpier, angrier and more impatient.

That's the judgement, that's what's been revealed. Now of course, other more positive things have been going on as well – none of us are that simple or transparent. But, too often I think, Christianity emphasises the good things that come out of hardship; it emphasises all the ways in which we've grown through difficulty. Unfortunately, the reality is that for most of humanity, suffering does not *naturally* bring out the best in us; it leads to vice not virtue.

The reality that I do not want to hear is that in the wake of the last 8 months I have probably not really become more Christ-like, in fact I have probably picked up a few habits of the heart that need re-aligning.

So, this Advent, I want to open myself up to that extraordinary unlimited Love that pours down from above. I want to let that love renew me even as we face another 5 or 6 months of life looking relatively similar. I want to invite Christ to come again into my heart (again and again and again) to renew me.

And, I want to develop greater habits of generosity towards everyone else who might also be grumpier, or angrier or less patient than they were; or who might have developed other wonky habits of the heart through these hard times. For we all need to give each other an extra pinch of grace in these days.

So, I invite you to join me on the journey into Advent. Amen.



Prayers of Intercession

Watchful at all times,
let us pray for strength to stand with confidence
before our Maker and Redeemer.
That God may bring in his kingdom with justice and mercy,
let us pray to the Lord:
Lord, have mercy.

That God may establish among the nations
his sceptre of righteousness,
let us pray to the Lord:
Lord, have mercy.

That we may seek Christ in the Scriptures
and recognize him in the breaking of the bread,
let us pray to the Lord:
Lord, have mercy.

That God may bind up the brokenhearted,
restore the sick
and raise up all who have fallen,
let us pray to the Lord:
Lord, have mercy.

That the light of God's coming may dawn
on all who live in darkness and the shadow of death,
let us pray to the Lord:
Lord, have mercy.

That, with all the saints in light,
we may shine forth as lights for the world,
let us pray to the Lord:
Lord, have mercy.

We commend ourselves and all for whom we pray
to the mercy and protection of our heavenly Father:

Silence is kept.



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

The Collect

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. **Amen.**

The Lord's Prayer

**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.**

Hymn

1. O come, O come, Emmanuel,
and ransom captive Israel,
that mourns in lonely exile here,
until the Son of God appear:

*Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel
shall come to thee, O Israel.*

2. O come, thou Rod of Jesse, free
thine own from Satan's tyranny;



from depths of hell thy people save,
and give them victory o'er the grave:

Rejoice ...

3. O come, thou Dayspring, come and cheer
our spirits by thine advent here;
disperse the gloomy clouds of night,
and death's dark shadows put to flight:

Rejoice ...

4. O come, thou Key of David, come,
and open wide our heavenly home;
make safe the way that leads on high,
and close the path to misery:

Rejoice ...

5. O come, O come, thou Lord of Might,
who to thy tribes, on Sinai's height,
in ancient times didst give the law
in cloud and majesty and awe:

Rejoice ...

Blessing

Christ the Sun of Righteousness shine upon you,
scatter the darkness from before your path,
and make you ready to meet him when he comes in glory;
and the blessing ...

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