

Sunday 10th December 2017

Liverpool Parish Church

2nd Sunday of Advent (B)

A Reflection for Sung Compline

“Wait . . . we embraced . . . we were happy . . . happy . . . what do we do now that we're happy . . . go on waiting . . . waiting . . . let me think . . . it's coming . . . go on waiting . . .”

These words are spoken by the character Vladimir in the play *Waiting for Godot*, Samuel Beckett's bleak, funny, surreal tragicomedy in which we glimpse the seemingly interminable waiting of two characters for someone who never arrives, an empty, hopeless waiting.

As Christians we too wait; in this season of Advent, we wait, praying 'O Lord our God, make us watchful and keep us faithful as we await the coming of your Son our Lord'. We wait for a time that is uncertain; in the Gospel According to St Mark, Jesus himself enjoins us to wait in watchfulness: 'Beware, keep alert; for you do not know when the time will come.' Similarly in the Gospel According to St Matthew, Jesus says: 'Keep awake therefore, for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming.' 'Therefore you also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an unexpected hour.' When, in The Acts of The Apostles, Jesus' friends ask 'Lord, is this the time when you will restore the Kingdom to Israel?', He answers: 'It is not for you to know the times or periods that the Father has set by his own authority.' And so they wait, waiting for the day that: 'This Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven.'

As Christians, we also wait eagerly; in St Paul's the letter to the Hebrews, we wait: 'so Christ, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time, not to deal with sin, but to save those who are eagerly waiting for him.' But although we wait eagerly, we also wait with patience; in the words of the First Letter of St Peter, we wait patiently to come 'into an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, who are being protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.' Yet we wait patiently because God is patient with us; as it is written in St Peter's Second Letter: 'with the Lord one day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years like one day. The Lord is not slow about his promise, as some think of slowness, but is patient with you, not wanting any to perish, but all to come to repentance. But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a loud noise, and the elements will be dissolved with fire, and the earth and everything that is done on it will be disclosed.' So again, we wait for an uncertain time: 'But, in accordance with his promise, we wait for new heavens and a new earth, where righteousness is at home.'

So, we wait eagerly and patiently; yet, as Christians, we wait for someone who is already here. As it says in The Revelation to St John: 'See, I am coming soon; my reward is with me, to repay according to everyone's work. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end.' 'Amen. Come, Lord Jesus!' We pray to God through Jesus who is alive and reigns in the unity of the Holy Spirit; the liturgy for Night Prayer contains imagery of watching and waiting for Jesus, but also with Jesus: 'Preserve us, O Lord, while waking, and guard us while sleeping, that awake we may watch with Christ', and 'As the night watch looks for the morning, so do we look for you, O Christ.' So, as Christians, we wait eagerly and patiently for the arrival at an uncertain time of someone who is already here and who is coming again; put like this, it sounds difficult to understand, perhaps, almost impossible; but we must remember, as Jesus says in St Mark's Gospel: 'For mortals it is impossible, but not for God; for God, all things are possible.' Therefore, as Christians, we wait in hope; St Paul's letter to the Romans tells us: 'For in hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what is seen? But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience.'

And why do we wait in hope? Because God's word has been fulfilled; as the devout Simeon says in St Luke's Gospel, which words have just been sung as the *Nunc dimittis*: 'Now, Lord, you let your servant go in peace; your word has been fulfilled. My own eyes have seen the salvation which you have prepared in the sight of every people; A light to reveal you to the nations and the glory of your people Israel.' As a devout Jew, Simeon had been looking all his life for God's saving action in Creation, and in acknowledging the infant Jesus as the Christ, he points to the fact that our salvation is achieved by God through the surrender of God's Son, Emmanuel, God among and with us, God's love of and redemption of Creation as the Word of Creation made flesh. But does everyone hear this word? And what can we do about it? I have been talking this evening about how, as Christians, we wait, eagerly, patiently, and hopefully in Christ for his coming again in God's Kingdom. But does everyone realise that the risen Jesus is alive and dwells among us? Is the Advent of Jesus and the Coming of the Kingdom a reality for those who do not yet know Him? Is Jesus Christ yet to come for them? Indeed, are they waiting for the saving love of Jesus Christ to enter their lives? And will this Advent season mark the moment that their waiting, their longing for God, will be fulfilled? As we wait in Christ, can we be the people who help the Gospel emerge in peoples' lives this Advent? As it says in St Paul's Second Letter to Timothy: 'proclaim the message; be persistent whether the time is favourable or unfavourable; convince, rebuke, and encourage, with the utmost patience in teaching.'

As Christians, we wait; we wait eagerly, patiently; and we wait in hope; we wait in hope because God's Word has been fulfilled in the Gospel, the Good News that is Jesus Christ, the Alpha and the Omega 'who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty.' This Advent, we can be the people who help point to the Gospel, to the emergence of God's Creating Word in our world and in our lives, the people who demonstrate through our relationships, through how we live and who we are, that God is Love, that Jesus

Christ is God's Love and that He is here for everyone; we can be the people who show others that, in the power of God's Holy Spirit, they too can wait – not the empty, seemingly hopeless waiting of Vladimir and Estragon in *Waiting for Godot*, but a waiting in hope, a being and waiting in Christ for the uniting of Creator with Creation in the Coming of God's Kingdom.

Louis Johnson