

Sunday 2nd December 2018
Advent I (C)

Liverpool Parish Church

OT: Jeremiah 33.14-16
NT: I Thessalonians 3.9-end
G: Luke 21.25-36

I begin with a cultural reference that may be beyond the wide scope of Fr Crispin's knowledge – Dr Who. But wishing to remain inclusive may I also offer the inventor of The Time Machine in H G Wells' novel of the same title.

Both travellers in time, no longer chronologically challenged but free to move along the continuum of history at the will of their space machines.

This morning the Church does not offer you a Tardis but still it can still feel that we are expected to travel through time. Today we begin a new year in the Church on this, Advent Sunday.

But we are asked to focus on the end of days. Today we firmly set our sights on Christmas, as we prepare to remember again the events of more than two thousand years ago. Yet we don't see Christmas as a history lesson, we believe that Jesus Christ will be born anew in our hearts as he was in that stable so many years past. And as we prepare for the first coming of Jesus amongst humanity, we are first asked to consider his second coming.

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. People will faint from fear and foreboding of what is coming upon the world, for the powers of the heavens will be shaken. Then they will see "the Son of Man coming in a cloud" with power and great glory.

Confusing isn't it? So what is being asked of us? Firstly to understand that God exists beyond the boundaries of time, that unlike Dr Who he does not require any time machine. God created time and time operates at God's command.

To paraphrase T S Eliot

All time is eternally present to God

Concepts such as infinity and eternity cannot be fully grasped by human minds but we don't need to be time travellers with all the uproar and the chaos that can bring. We can concentrate on living in the present moment. Brother Lawrence who worked in his community's kitchen, called it the Sacrament of the Present Moment. He dedicated his life to not dwelling too much in the past, on things that cannot be changed.

Nor did he choose to concern himself too much with the future, worrying about what might happen. Rather he sought to find God there in the present among the menial chores of the kitchen, in the blessings of community worship, in the stillness of his own room. Through this practice of striving to live in the present, Brother Lawrence lived a life of rich contentment with no regrets for the past or anxiety for the future.

This focus on the present moment may be a good Advent discipline for us. It might help us to enjoy the Carol Service that we are in without thinking too much about the other 3 we are involved in that week. It might help relieve the stress of all the Christmas shopping by allowing us to plan and do what we can do that day without worrying too much about tomorrow and what that might bring.

And most importantly, it might help us to find those moments of stillness that are there in every day if only we look for them. Those moments of stillness where God can be found walking alongside us. Advent is not something to be got through before we can get to Christmas, it is a season which brings its own rich gifts.

If we are called to live in the present moment of Advent, then we are also called to wait for Christmas, that first coming of Jesus, and for the end of days when he will return in all his glory.

The early Christians believed that the world would end at any moment and that Jesus would return to take them all to his kingdom. Did they put their lives on hold, was it like waiting for a bus when you grow impatient and finally give up and set off walking only to see the bus sail past you five minutes later? Or did they trust in God that all would come to pass in his time and they got on with living their lives in the fullness of his grace?

This week, 3 distinguished people, all in the 90s have died. Baroness Trumpington, Harry Leslie Smith and George Bush Senior. They all lived very full lives and I can't believe that they came to a point when they thought that death couldn't be far away so that they would just give up living until it came. Unlike my great aunt Edith who when she reached 80 declared that she was taking to her bed and promptly did so until her death some years later.

Waiting and focusing on that present moment is a liberating experience. Unlike the person at the bus stop, dithering about whether to stay or go, growing increasingly stressed about what they

could be getting on with, those who wait and accept that waiting can be fruitful are set free to live in that moment and find contentment.

So we **are** beginning a new Church year, we **are** considering the end of time but we can do both these things in the stillness of the present because we live in the certainty that Jesus Christ was born into this world, that he died and was buried, that he rose from the dead and that one day, in God's own time, he will come again in all his glory. Then we will know the kingdom of God in all its fullness. But for now we can wait with hope, we can concentrate on the present, knowing that our past is forgiven and our future is safe in God's hands. We can get on with living each present moment, cherishing the stillness that we find in the presence of God, confident that the almighty God lives among us.

Be still, and know that I am God! I am exalted among the nations, I am exalted in the earth.' The Lord of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our refuge.

The Revd Michelle Montrose