

**Sunday 28<sup>th</sup> November 2021**  
**1<sup>st</sup> Sunday of Advent (C)**

**Liverpool Parish Church**

**OT: Jeremiah 33.14-16**  
**NT: 1 Thessalonians 3.9-end**  
**G: Luke 21.25-36**

In our reading today Jesus encouraged his disciples to look at the fig tree. But as I walk down the Strand and through the streets of the city, I see different signs- lights decorating the trees, ornamental reindeer, candy canes and I hear the music of the season in stores, with people quite a bit busier than usual. All these are signs that a day is coming. Even a child can tell you that Christmas is coming!

Advent is here again! The historical origins of Advent are hard to determine with great precision; no evidence exists around the feast of the Nativity of the Lord before the end of the fourth century. Pope Gregory I in the late 6th/early 7th century composed many of the prayers, antiphons, and psalm responses. Many themes and ideas appeared during the time of Pope St. Gregory VII from 1073-1085. The Advent preparation was similar to Lent with an emphasis on fasting and the early church encouraged Christians to dedicate this time to readying themselves for Christ.

Today's Gospel reading, not the simplest of Jesus' teaching. I do not know of a Gospel reading that is difficult to interpret than Jesus' words about the end of the world. He speaks about the end times in phrases and images that are unfamiliar to us. We have a word for this apocalyptic, but that is unhelpful. Advent lessons are unapologetically straightforward. We wish for the joy of Christmas carols and the nativity story, but we get little of that during Advent.

The liturgical year follows the life of Christ – his birth, life, and works of Jesus in his public ministry; his suffering, death, and resurrection; his ascension and the coming of Holy Spirit into our lives and Church. It all begins with this season of advent; a holy time of waiting and watching. It is during these four weeks leading up to Christmas that we turn our attention to his first coming in a remote humble stable of Bethlehem; his second coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory on the Last day; and his daily coming to us through his divine Word in scripture and the sacraments.

We must remember that Advent is concerned as much with the future as with the past. If our waiting is only about looking forward to a feast on December 25<sup>th</sup>, then Christmas will have little purpose. My email inbox was filled with Black Friday adverts, as I am sure yours were too. Sometimes Advent season becomes more about us and less about him. It is something like saying, I need to find perfect gift for each person in my family to have a perfect Christmas, I must plan the best menu and that means timing 4 dishes to come out of the same oven at the same time. It's all too easy to get caught up with ourselves.

I read a story, it is typical of last- minute Christmas shoppers, a mother was running from store to store. Suddenly she became aware that her four- year-old son was no longer walking next to her. She retracted her steps and found him gazing at a manger scene. Hearing his mothers call, he turned and shouted with innocent glee: Look mummy! Its Jesus – Baby Jesus in the hay! She impatiently pulled him away saying, “We don't have time for that!

Karoline Lewis writes, why advent? To help us see beyond our present. Why advent? To give us a lens through which to see God at work when it seems only evil gets the spotlight. Why advent? To assure us that God has secured a future for us that breaks into our present, and really, truly changes our here and now.

This week's newspaper headlines were a testimony to the kind of darkness we face: 27 people headed for the UK have drowned in the English Channel. The ice sheets are crumbling faster than we thought; global change is eroding life on earth at an unprecedented rate and scale.

The advent for us begins with strong words urging us to stay alert, and to wait with patience for God to come into the dark places. It is during these weeks that we focus on the biblical meaning of the word 'hope'. A hope that Christ will come again in glory; hope that everything wrong with this world will be done away with.

Our Old Testament reading for the festival of Christ the King was from Daniel 7 and said this: "In my vision at night I looked, and there before me was one like a son of man, coming with the clouds of heaven. He approached the Ancient of Days and was led into his presence. 14 He was given authority, glory, and sovereign power; all nations and peoples of every language worshiped him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away, and his kingdom is one that will never be destroyed" Jesus is that Son of Man spoken of by Daniel, "coming with the clouds of heaven"

Jesus the Son of Man calls us to something different even as the world around us is literally falling apart. In verse 28 Jesus tells us to lift up our heads; to take heart and rejoice because he is coming to make all things new. He is coming to take us to be with him forever. The last public appearance of Jesus was when he hung bruised and broken on the cross. When the world will see Jesus next, how different he will look! No longer crushed, and broken, but crowned with heavenly glory and splendour as King and Judge of all creation. He reminds us: "Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away" (Luke 21:33). Let us, hold onto these words!

Jesus shares with us the signs so that we may be prepared and ready for his coming. The one who has come and who is coming again, comes to us now in his Word and Sacraments. Jesus

is teaching us to wait for the decisiveness of his promises, of the great and awesome day of the Lord's coming. He visits us in this painful, broken, impatient world. When we wait for shapes who we are, it will shape us into those who wait and watch for Christ.

For me Advent is about accepting the growing darkness of the unknown and having faith enough to go on anyway. In these blessed days as we try to give God our sole attention, take heart that God waits for us. God is always ready to meet us, to reach for us. I recently read that the real revelation of the incarnation, and the Second Coming is that, in Jesus, God is always straining to reach us where we are.

The late Catholic priest, Henri Nouwen, said this, "Waiting for God is an active, alert, joyful-waiting. Waiting patiently is not like waiting for a bus to come, the rain to stop, or the sun to rise. It is an active waiting in which we live the present moment to the full in order to find there the sign of the One we are waiting for. It takes Patience, and the Latin verb for patience means 'to suffer.'"

Advent is about waiting patiently for the world to be redeemed. Amid all the hustle and bustle of this season of year, Advent calls us to step back into a place of quiet haven. Instead of hastily rushing about, Advent invites us to find newness and blessed peace. Advent is a call to renewed faith and hope; to greater watchfulness and prayer that "we may be alert at all times, praying that we may have strength to escape all these things that are going to take place, and to stand before the Son of Man"

May the Lord grant us all a Blessed Advent

The Revd Tabitha Rao