

## **Sermon First Sunday of Advent**

**Isaiah 63:16-17,64:1,3-8 1. Corinthians 1.3-9, Mark 13:33-37.**

### ***Waiting at the double***

There are really two types of waiting in life. There is that waiting for something that you know is going to happen and when and then there is a waiting for something that you think probably will or might happen but you don't know when. You know that this giant egg timer will come to an end but you don't know when – I do – and no it isn't at the end of the sermon. It lasts 30 minutes – so be grateful for that!

The season of advent is a double waiting. This double waiting permeates all our readings and many of our carols and hymns: waiting to celebrate the Birth of Jesus into the world and waiting for his second coming – the end of time. For most of my life and usually for the world it is just the first type filled with busy preparation for a very truncated feast time of Christmas. However the biggest global crisis of our time: that of climate change is creeping into our psyches. We know it will be serious but not how serious or when. However we get hints and signs of the impact now and much of the language used by speakers at the COP conferences can be apocalyptic though it only shifts the dial a bit.

As Christians our two way gazing and two way reflection and preparation has much to offer the world: whether it be climate change or the unknowns of the current wars and disputes that darken our life at this time. We firstly, prepare to give thanks for the first coming of God in Christ, that offers light in darkness: light in humility obscurity and indeed suffering. We secondly prepare for the coming of Christ that heralds the end – our end yes but the end of all things. It is a shame that our gospel does not start at the previous verse when our Lord says “no-one knows the hour not even the angels” So it is with so many of the big issues of our

day but Christian waiting is not a fatalistic que sera sera. Christian waiting involves embracing the first coming of Christ that we might be called call to action for the future and delight in the present.

The contemplation of the end and indeed our own mortality has merit if illuminated with the remembrance of our Lord's birth into our world as it is with all its challenges and our lives as they are – sorrows and joys. Too much worry about the end and the present – life itself passes us by. No regard for the end and we may drown in daily doings that are no more lasting than that ghastly foam cream from a can.

We have 2 scripture readings to help us get the balance right.

Isaiah: Addressed to the Hebrews in Babylonian exile – Jerusalem has been destroyed – the Hebrews await a better future with reconstruction of and restitution to their home. It is a heartfelt plea and in it there is a big question – will they be worthy of such restoration. So self-examination is part of their heartfelt pleading.

In Paul's letter to the Corinthians we have what might seem at first to be a nice “Christmas” letter full of greetings and blessings – very nice. But then WALLOP he lays into them for their divisions and conforming to worldly standard's rather than God's.

I began by speaking of a double waiting and if you think about it English so often has a double meaning for the same word. To wait is a good example. It might helps us get the right balance. We can wait for something and we can also wait upon another. The first can be about self but the second is attentive to another's needs – think of the good waiter in the restaurant – not the type that interrupts the conversation every two minutes. When we celebrate Christmas the first coming of Christ we are celebrating God who is attentive to us who serves and loves us in Christ.

On the one hand Advent calls us ponder, pause, delight and reflect. Through this our true self, our fears, delights, hopes and realities might be distilled. But it can never be about the self alone for the pattern of Christ is finding oneself through service. It is a call to proactive waiting that involves preparedness to fulfil ones own calling by attending to others.

I have said before that the military life involves a great deal of waiting and it is not unique in that. The balance is often put at 90% waiting and 10% frenetic doing: though of course it depends on the job. (Chefs and pay clerks might give a different picture – as would chaplains). However in the 90% there is much to do guarding, sleeping, preparation of kit, training and socialising (if you're going to war with someone it better to know who they are – there's a thought ...perhaps we might say if you're going to spend eternity with folk it might be good to know them a bit).

Whatever our particular circumstances Advent can help us get the balance right – by allowing God to do the balancing.

His first coming into our time and space, to share our load and life, is truly to be welcomed in a fresh and different way. Some contemplation and reflection on the end of time and our own end, our mortality will change our living and our priorities. It is of course what we do in the Eucharist each time we take bread and wine – we remember with thanks, we look forward with hope and we are fed for doing right in the now. God waits on us, and we are called to wait with him, and then on him, not least by waiting on by serving others – that was our Lord's voice from last week – as long as you do it to the least you do it to me.

I wish you a blessed Advent that we may all look both ways; with thanksgiving and celebration for the light that first came into the

world, and with hope for that same light to show us now and to the end of days the way of life that never ends.

The Revd Fr. David Wylie RN  
St.Margaret of Antioch  
Advent Sunday 2023