

## Holy Trinity

Advent Sunday 2020 (29<sup>th</sup> Nov.)

Readings: Isaiah 2:1-5 and Luke 12:35-48

Both our readings relate to 'being prepared' – [CC: 'Are you ready?']. Isaiah speaks of 'the last days' (2:2). Clearly, he is speaking of something future. Ten times the NIV in these five verses uses the word 'will':

'the mountain of the LORD's temple will be established'

'it will be raised above the hills'

'Many peoples will come'

'[God] will teach us his ways'

'The law will go out from Zion'

'He will judge... he will settle disputes'

'They will beat their swords into ploughshares and their spears into pruning hooks.'

And negatively:

'Nation will not take up sword against nation, nor will they train for war any more.'

What we hear here is good news. But it has not yet come. It's the World as God intended it – symbolised by the Garden of Eden. The original design and purpose for His creation. In short, we were made for the presence of God – we were made for WORSHIP.

What is worship? These verses are an invitation. Verse 3: 'Many peoples will come and say, "Come let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob."' '[T]he house of... God' is the 'temple'. And to enter into the 'temple' is to enter into God's presence. The Bible is recorded in order to enable us to do that. To come face to face as it were with the living God.

How do we get ourselves ready for such a wonderful experience, verse 5: 'Come, O house of Jacob, let us walk in the light of the LORD.' We could almost translate, 'Come, you who identify with Jacob...' Jacob, of course, was renamed by God, 'Israel' – a name that means literally, 'he who struggles with God' (Gen. 32:28).

Do you struggle with God? I think in a way that's what defines a Christian. Not someone with all the answers. But someone who – with God - struggles with God in all the situations they face in their lives.

Advent is such a great period of the church's year. It's not without significance that the church's year begins with Advent. Not with Christmas, nor with Epiphany, nor with Good Friday, nor even with Easter or Pentecost. The church's year begins with a period of preparation. 'Come', because of what God is going to do, 'let us walk in the light of the LORD.'

In the NT we meet Jesus who described Himself as 'the light of the world' (John 8:12). The Advent Collect captures the two aspects of Advent. It begins, 'Almighty God, give us grace to cast away the works of darkness and to put on the armour of light [a time of preparation] 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, [preparation for the future also] when he shall come again in his glorious majesty to judge the living and the dead, we may rise to the life immortal'.

One of the best ways to make ourselves ready is to allow the 'light of Christ' to shine in our lives. How? The Apostle Paul gives us a good perspective: Having famously spoken of the 'fruit of the Spirit' in Galatians 5:22-23 ('love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control') two verses later he writes, 'Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit'. Examine your life – the light of the fruit that is expected for someone in whom the Spirit of Jesus lives.

Our Gospel reading is all about 'being ready'. Luke 12:35: 'Be dressed ready for service and keep your lamps burning...' Jesus uses a number of pictures to underline the importance of 'being ready'. The first relates to servants and a master. Perhaps in today's terms we would think more of employees and their employer. To be caught playing a game on your computer when you should have been preparing for a meeting – would not go down well. In my ministry, I suppose it'd be like the Bishop turning up unexpectedly when I should be working and finding me still in my dressing gown.

I love the way that parable ends, verse 37: 'It will be good for those servants whose master finds them watching when he comes. I tell you the truth, he will dress himself to serve, will have them recline at the table and will come and wait on them.' Rather like if the Bishop comes to the church unexpectedly and finds me delivering an excellent sermon – clearly well-prepared, thought-provoking and relevant. He might say, 'Why don't you come round to my house and have some grub with us?'

The second picture, some of us will resonate with. The burglar. I remember my aunt having a burglar. And if I remember correctly, she'd left the backdoor unlocked. If she'd known that a burglar was about, she certainly would have made sure that door was locked.

Jesus emphasises His point, verse 40: 'You also must be ready, because the Son of Man [that is 'Jesus Himself'] will come at an hour when you do not expect...'. .

In characteristic fashion, Peter interrupts. It's not quite clear why. Verse 41, 'Lord, are you telling this parable to us, or to everyone?' Was he feeling got at? Did he feel that he and the other close disciples had already done a lot? Was Jesus suggesting that they should be more ready than they are?

Do we sometimes feel like that? 'I'm doing my best! What more can be expected of me?' As so often Jesus doesn't seem to answer the question directly. Rather he answers the question behind the question.

It's worth noting that Peter asks: 'Is what Jesus has just said, just "to us, or to everyone?"' Jesus ends this section (v.48) by saying, 'From everyone who has been given much...'. His answer therefore is that it is for everyone – everyone who considers themselves a servant of God. But, in particular, those who have great responsibility in the kingdom of God, have a great responsibility to live up to it.

He speaks of a servant with responsibility over other servants, v.45: 'Suppose the servant [who's been put in responsibility over other servants] says to himself, "My master is taking a long time in coming," and he then begins to beat the menservants and maidservants and to eat and drink and get drunk.' You see, he's abusing the trust he's been given. That's not how it should be.

How wrong it is to behave in an ungodly way – because you think no one's watching. But Jesus says: Be always ready, because His return will be unexpected. Too many Christians throughout history have attempted to predict when Jesus will return. Jesus says over and over again, you can't know. But 'be ready'. In this parable Jesus effectively says to Peter, who will become one of the key leaders of the early church – make sure you're ready. Verse 48, 'From everyone who has been given much, much will be demanded; and from the one who is entrusted with much, much more will be asked.' It reminds me of the words of James 3:1 where James wisely says, 'Not many of you should presume to be teachers... because you know that we who teach will be judged more strictly.' Sometimes we can envy other people's responsibilities. But what Jesus says here in Luke 12, is that all of us should be ready.

Advent is a great time for preparation. I know that in my own life all sorts of sin, or maybe carelessness – can put God on the back burner.

Some of you will know that just this week after a longish battle with cancer, my brother died. Many of you also will have experienced the loss of someone close to you. It's been quite an emotional few days, for all kinds of reasons. But having the person I've known longest in this world die, and is in a sense my contemporary (4 years older), has made me ask of myself, 'Am I ready?'

Let me close with the thought: Advent, even more than Lent, is an opportunity to ask yourself that question: 'Am I ready?'

## **Prayers**

### Collect

Almighty God,  
give us grace to cast away the works of darkness  
and 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.**

### **Intercessions**

In joyful expectation of his coming to our aid we pray to Jesus.

Maranatha:

**Amen. Come, Lord Jesus.**

Come to your Church as Lord and judge.

We pray for...

Help us to live in the light of your coming and give us a longing for your kingdom.

Maranatha:

**Amen. Come, Lord Jesus.**

Come to your world as King of the nations.

We pray for...

Before you rulers will stand in silence.

Maranatha:

**Amen. Come, Lord Jesus.**

Come to the suffering as Saviour and comforter.

We pray for...

Break into our lives,  
where we struggle with sickness and distress,  
and set us free to serve you for ever.

Maranatha:

**Amen. Come, Lord Jesus.**

Come to us as shepherd and guardian of our souls.

We remember...

Give us with all the faithful departed a share in your victory over evil and death.

Maranatha:

**Amen. Come, Lord Jesus.**

Come from heaven, Lord Jesus, with power and great glory.

Lift us up to meet you,

that with all your saints and angels we may live and reign with you in your new creation.

Maranatha:

**Amen. Come, Lord Jesus.**

Come, Lord Jesus, do not delay;  
give new courage to your people,  
who trust in your love.

By your coming, raise us to share in the joy of your kingdom on earth as in heaven,

where you live and reign with the Father and the Spirit, one God for ever and 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.**