

Reflections for 29th November 2020

Advent Sunday

How good are you at forecasting? With the Covid Pandemic we all want to know when it will end: We hear far too much about turmoil in the financial markets and closure of non-essential shops; does that mean that there is going to be some sort of apocalypse? Jesus talked about there being affliction that has not been since the beginning of creation but declined to say when it would actually arrive. Is the pandemic a sign of the second coming? Less exciting but more like Jesus' parable of the fig tree, I have noticed huge amounts of berries on the holly trees and elsewhere, does that mean we are going to have another hard winter? Our newspapers are often more full of correspondents' ideas of what might follow from an item of news than the actual news that is being reported. In some areas we are better at forecasting than others but it seems that forecasting the future is something that has been going on for a long time.

We are approaching the season of Advent. It is a time of preparation for the Son of Man at coming at Christmas. So, why are we having a reading about the end of time?

The answer I think is that we are at the start of Advent; a time of preparation, in this case our celebration of the birth of Jesus. It is a time when we can foretell quite certainly that Christmas will arrive in a little over four weeks and even in these strange times, we can prepare for it. There is not much actual forecasting but there is a lot of preparation to be done and limited time.

If there is something sensational coming, we are usually quite good at making an effort to be ready for it. But we don't know when the second coming of Christ will be and we have ceased to regard it as something imminent. We probably expect it will be well into the future and as we have waited 2,000 years why should we imagine that it is just about to happen now? Should we prepare for a future event which may not happen in our lifetime? The closing verses of the reading tell us to watch and pray. Be prepared for a second coming. In the recent weeks the gospel readings have told us first that using our gifts to the best of our ability is something we need to do and second looking at the needs of others and seeing what we can do about those needs is something we can work at.

Advent is all about preparation but like a dog, it is not just for Christmas. We need to prepare for the coming of the kingdom of heaven whenever that might be for each of us. Perhaps we will never be fully prepared but it seems to me that a good way to work is by doing those things that the gospel readings of the last few weeks have been suggesting, that is by using our talents to the best of our ability and by helping our neighbours as much as we can. Then we will be as ready as possible for the good news of the coming of God's kingdom whether it is at Jesus' second coming or when we meet our saviour in heaven.

Jeremy Hopkinson, LL.M

Heavenly Father,
help us to look to the needs of all
and be prepared for your second coming. Amen.

Bible readings: Isaiah 64: 1-9; I Corinthians 1: 3-9; Mark 13: 24-37

Story: 'The Big Spender' (based on the parable of the lost son: Luke 15)