

COLLECT, READINGS AND REFLECTION
SUNDAY 28 NOVEMBER 2021 – 1st OF ADVENT

COLLECT

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

Psalm 25: 1-9

- 1 To you, O Lord, I lift up my soul;
O my God, in you I trust; ♦
let me not be put to shame;
let not my enemies triumph over me.
- 2 Let none who look to you be put to shame, ♦
but let the treacherous be shamed and frustrated.
- 3 Make me to know your ways, O Lord, ♦
and teach me your paths.
- 4 Lead me in your truth and teach me, ♦
for you are the God of my salvation;
for you have I hoped all the day long.
- 5 Remember, Lord, your compassion and love, ♦
for they are from everlasting.
- 6 Remember not the sins of my youth
or my transgressions, ♦
but think on me in your goodness, O Lord,
according to your steadfast love.
- 7 Gracious and upright is the Lord; ♦
therefore shall he teach sinners in the way.
- 8 He will guide the humble in doing right ♦
and teach his way to the lowly.
- 9 All the paths of the Lord are mercy and truth ♦
to those who keep his covenant and his testimonies.

1 Thessalonians 3: 9-13

⁹ How can we thank God enough for you in return for all the joy that we feel before our God because of you? ¹⁰ Night and day we pray most earnestly that we may see you face to face and restore whatever is lacking in your faith.

¹¹ Now may our God and Father himself and our Lord Jesus direct our way to you. ¹² And may the Lord make you increase and abound in love for one another and for all, just as we abound in love for you. ¹³ And may he so strengthen your hearts in holiness that you may be blameless before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all his saints.

Luke 21: 25-36

The Coming of the Son of Man

²⁵ "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. ²⁶ People will faint from fear and foreboding of what is coming upon the world, for the powers of the heavens will be shaken. ²⁷ Then they will see 'the Son of Man coming in a cloud' with power and great glory. ²⁸ Now when these things begin to take place, stand up and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near."

The Lesson of the Fig Tree

²⁹ Then he told them a parable: "Look at the fig tree and all the trees; ³⁰ as soon as they sprout leaves you can see for yourselves and know that summer is already near. ³¹ So also, when you see these things taking place, you know that the kingdom of God is near. ³² Truly I tell you, this generation will not pass away until all things have taken place. ³³ Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.

Exhortation to Watch

³⁴ "Be on guard so that your hearts are not weighed down with dissipation and drunkenness and the worries of this life, and that day does not catch you unexpectedly, ³⁵ like a trap. For it will come upon all who live on the face of the whole earth. ³⁶ Be alert at all times, praying that you may have the strength to escape all these things that will take place, and to stand before the Son of Man."

A reflection from Hannah....

Imagine one of those moments when someone holds their line as chaos reigns around them. So, it might be a battle scene in an epic film- *Braveheart* or *Lord of the Rings* maybe, when people stand, shoulder to shoulder, looking out across the field, as they are told to be still, to hold their position, to remain, even when the opposition advances. Or, if it's more helpful, imagine that poem called *If*- 'if you can keep your head when all around are losing theirs... then you'll be a man, my son.'

That image of standing firm as everything around us is un-steadied is, I hope, helpful as we consider the reading from Luke's gospel today. Here, Jesus describes some alarming events- signs in the heavens, the nations in anguish and perplexity, people fainting with terror. What is Jesus talking about?

Well, that question has preoccupied us for millennia. Was he talking about something that was literally about to happen, something that will keep going on through time, or something that will only happen at the very end of all things? In 70AD we know that the temple was destroyed- something Jesus alludes to in these apocalyptic teachings. We know too that tumult, war, disruption, the changing of world orders, natural disaster, all sorts have continued to happen throughout history, so perhaps Jesus is talking about a general state of human experience. We also have a clear biblical picture that the end times (or we might say the beginning- of making all things new), will include the return of Jesus as our unmistakable king- the son of man coming in a cloud with great power and glory- as the passage puts it. Whatever other things have happened, we know THAT hasn't happened yet. So to a greater or lesser extent, the events that this passage describes are still unfolding.

Advent is about conscious attention to that waiting. Waiting for the return of Jesus, who will herald the renewing of all things and our discovery of our true home. How are we asked to behave during these times of waiting- which includes Advent, but is actually the posture of Christians generally? Well, Jesus says 'stand up and lift up your heads, because redemption is drawing near....be alert at all times.'

Jesus asks us to watch and wait. The world changes and is thrown into disarray, but we are to be still, and to remain faithful to Jesus- amidst temptations to throw us this way and that, and so many new and different ideas being banded about. At Advent we remind ourselves of that. As we watch, what do we notice? How can the gospel speak answers to the questions that rage around us, in these uncertain and distressing times? I wonder what will unfold as Advent does? How will the unchanging word of Jesus help us to live as disciples in the chaos that surrounds us?