

Advent Sunday

Sunday 28th November 2021

Jeremiah 33: 14-16;

The days are surely coming, says the LORD, when I will fulfil the promise I made to the house of Israel and the house of Judah. ¹⁵In those days and at that time I will cause a righteous Branch to spring up for David; and he shall execute justice and righteousness in the land. ¹⁶In those days Judah will be saved and Jerusalem will live in safety. And this is the name by which it will be called: ‘The LORD is our righteousness.’

1 Thessalonians 3: 9-end;

How can we thank God enough for you in return for all the joy that we feel before our God because of you? ¹⁰Night 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. ¹²And may the Lord make you increase and abound in love for one another and for all, just as we abound in love for you. ¹³And 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;

Jesus said to his disciples:

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

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

‘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, ³⁵like a trap. For it will come upon all who live on the face of the whole earth. ³⁶Be 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.’

Reflection

Offered by Sarah

“My hope is that you will be strengthened with the certainty of
the love of God”

- the Queen’s message to members of the General Synod (lay, clergy and bishops) of the Church of England meeting in London two weeks ago. The Queen in her remarkable insight and understanding, named key issues for the Church today and facing General Synod members. As always, she spoke of and for the anxieties and hopes of those gathered, and yet, her message could also have been addressed to anyone with uncertainty and challenges. The Queen as always spoke with encouragement, and from her deeply held and lived Christian faith.

“My hope is that you will be strengthened with the certainty of
the love of God”.

For whom would you want to hear this prayer said?

Someone close to you who is ill, or fearful, or lonely?

Someone who cares for another?

Someone who is grieving?

Exhausted health care workers?

Public servants with the greatest responsibility of leadership?

Peace-keepers and peace-makers? Those who bring humanitarian relief?

“My hope is that you will be strengthened with the certainty of the love of God”.

Do we hear this prayer for ourselves?

Do we pray that we shall be strengthened with the certainty of the love of God?

Notice, the prayer is for the “certainty” of the love of God.

How important it is in times of uncertainty and change, fear and tiredness, to have the certainty of God’s love. Because in times of testing, it can feel as if things are falling apart – and we can feel adrift – but the love of God is constant- - it does not depend on us. Wonderfully God’s love is always there – unchanging – it has no beginning nor ending.

Advent is a season of preparation and waiting; of expectant coming and thankfulness for Jesus already come; of being alert and being ready. There is in this a heightened sense of needing to be active to be ready for the day when the Son of Man shall come and with it, God’s kingdom – and yet, I don’t think Jesus’ teaching about the Coming, is telling us to be hyperactive – as if we are to get everything in place and in order for a day that is near and yet unknown.

This is not to say we put our feet up and do nothing – rather, for the emphasis and energy of our doing to come by watching for

God's signs of activity in the world, to learn from and to be caught up in them. Advent reminds us to take time to let God show us what His kingdom is about and what He wants us to do to prepare for it's coming.

To make time to see God active – God already present in the world and showing us what is yet to come. To see the transforming nature of God's love and to allow our hearts to be open to receive His love and transform our lives. This season asks us to take time to simply stop, to be still, to listen, to watch, and to wait.

To have the eyes for the small signs of God's presence. The signs may be small (at first) but that is not the same as saying God's presence is small.

Jesus told his disciples to look for leaves sprouting on the fig tree as a sign. This passage reminds us of Isaiah's prophecy (11: 1) for the coming of the Messiah, "*A shoot shall come from the stock of Jesse, and a branch shall grow out of his roots*".

A bud on a tree is only noticeable to the one who stands and looks for it and who watches it open and witness the tree come into full leaf.

Today's readings all have messages to encourage people to know God in their hearts.

Jeremiah – written during great political upheaval in Judah in the sixth century BCE. The time of Judah's fall to Babylon; the invasion and fall of Jerusalem and its temple and King's palaces destroyed; exile. The invasion caused starvation and death for many,

destroyed national and family life, shook theological and political foundations of people's identity. Jeremiah in exile in Babylon, encourages people to come close to God and to learn of His ways, and how He shall fulfil His promise to them.

Thessalonians – Paul is in Corinth. Timothy returns to him after visiting the Thessalonian Church, with news they are living with faith and love. Paul is thankful – and encourages them to live even more with love – “*to abound in love for one another and for all*” (3: 12). God’s love for them is to be the source of love for each other and for others – the outward dimension of their Christian discipleship. Their life as Christians – as a Church is effective when God lives in their hearts, and they respond with His love – Paul prays “*may he so strengthen your hearts in holiness*” (3: 13) Then they shall be prepared for the Coming of the Lord Jesus and all the saints.

Luke – Jesus tells the disciples to pray for strength for the coming of God’s Kingdom. A different Kingdom – that shall shake upside down the worries and wrongs of today’s world. Jesus encourages them to believe in the constancy of God’s word and the fulfilment of His promises.

May our Advent prayer be for people everywhere, for one another, for the Church, for ourselves that we shall be strengthened with the certainty of God’s love, watchful for God’s signs of His love, abound in love for others, and be effective in doing God’s work through us. Amen.