

Sermon for Sunday 28 November 2021

Advent Sunday

Jeremiah 33: 14 – 16; 1 Thessalonians 3: 9 – end; Luke 21: 25 – 36

Waiting Well

I was in Fulbrook School on Friday taking an assembly for Year 6 on the theme of Advent. Some of the classes hadn't got the message that they were supposed to be gathering for Assembly, so those who arrived first had to wait for a while before we were able to begin. Last thing on a Friday afternoon, just before going home, waiting wasn't very easy for them, and they were somewhat restive. I was able to tell them that Advent was all about waiting – and that waiting well was worth learning. During Advent we wait not only for Christmas, but we remind ourselves that we are also waiting for the day Jesus will return in judgement and glory to bring in a new kingdom, and to restore all that we humans have damaged and broken.

I suspect that waiting doesn't come easily to any of us. We live in a culture where we expect things to happen almost instantly. I try not to use Amazon more than I have to – but when I do I'm amazed at how quickly things that I've ordered can arrive on my doorstep. I don't need it to be that quick most of the time. But also post-Brexit and at this stage in the pandemic many of us are having to wait for longer – and sometimes for really important things like hospital procedures.

But waiting well is a theme that comes out from all of our readings today.

Our reading from Jeremiah speaks about waiting in times of loss. Jeremiah the prophet has spent his whole life telling the people of Israel and their kings things that they didn't want to hear. During this time he's watched the destruction of the nation and the division of the people. He's now been imprisoned by his own King for being right, and the enemies of Jerusalem are besieging the city. Suddenly amidst all of this Jeremiah is filled with hope; he

tells the people that God's present judgement doesn't undo His earlier promise to Israel. If they wait, watch, endure and try to see the hand of God at work, they will be preparing themselves for the time when Judah will be saved and Jerusalem will live in safety.

So for those of us experiencing this Advent at a time of loss – and there have been many losses for all of us during the pandemic – Jeremiah reminds us that God is still in control and that in the end, as the mystic Julian of Norwich puts it “all shall be well and all shall be well and all manner of thing shall be well.”¹

But how do we wait well?

We wait well by being prepared. I remember still the end of our daughter's first term at university. We were of course very much looking forward to her homecoming. But with her two brothers still at home, besides work and church, we seemed to be very busy. We had been using her bedroom as a study, and our

¹ *Enfolded in Love, daily readings with Julian of Norwich*, p15

computer was still set up on her desk when she arrived home. I still remember how upset she was to find it there. She must have felt as if we no longer had room for her in our hearts. Not one of my best moments as a parent!

We wait well by avoiding distractions. In our Gospel reading, Luke says this – “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 like a trap.” (Luke 21: 34). I don't think of St Michael's being so likely to succumb to dissipation and drunkenness, but even good things – even the things we do for other people and for God - can distract us from our walk with Jesus. If we're too busy to have any time to slow down, to notice God and to notice the world around us and to pray, then we're too busy!

We wait well by learning to recognise the signs of the kingdom of God here and now. Luke gives us Jesus' vivid parable of the fig tree. Anyone can see from a tree when summer is

coming. So we are to look for the signs of God's kingdom amongst us and in our community.

When do we sense the presence of the Holy Spirit in our worship? Where are the poor, the lost and the lonely being served? And how do we join in with what God is already doing?

Perhaps most importantly, we wait well by getting to know the person we're waiting for. Think about what happens when we have a guest coming to our home for a meal or a longer visit. We think about what they're like and what they will need, don't we? We may make a special effort to be in touch with them to find out what they like to eat, or if it's a longer stay, what they might like to do while they are with us. What do they hope for from their time with us? What are their expectations of us?

So – in the midst of – and despite all the busyness of the coming weeks, my Advent challenge to you is to wait well. Remember God's promises despite all the losses. Be prepared to receive Jesus – not just the baby in the manger, but as the Son of Man who comes

in power and glory. Try to avoid things that are just distractions. Be open to notice where the Holy Spirit is already at work bringing about God's kingdom. Spend some time getting to know Jesus better – in stillness, in prayer, in reading or perhaps by joining with one of our Advent groups. If we can do these things – or at least some of them some of the time - Then our hearts will be prepared to receive the king of kings.

Amen

Revd Diana Young 27 November 2021