

Advent Sunday 2020

One of the features of Advent is, of course, its name. It comes from the Latin word for arriving. When we enter the season of advent, we inevitably think of Christmas on its way. This year it will feel very different, but we may still have been involved in lots of Christmas preparations already, or perhaps we are beginning to think about sending out cards or doing our shopping - which is a bit more complicated at the moment. And perhaps we're getting to think of how we're going to manage our Christmas bubbles.

We also think of other things. Traditionally in the Christian understanding of Advent, we think about the coming of Jesus - Jesus coming, not at Christmas time, but at the end of time. And that has sometimes given us a very ominous and gloomy sense of what Advent is about. Hell, death and judgment were often traditional things to reflect on during the Sundays of this season.

I think we need to be a bit more positive than that, and our reading today gives us a sense of that. It conveys that the Advent hope is not about thinking ahead to the frightening prospect of the destruction of things, but the sense that we will be in fellowship with Jesus. As it says in our reading, "He will also strengthen you to the end, so that you may be blameless on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ". And then it follows up with "God is faithful. By him you were called into the fellowship of his son". There is a pervasive theme in advent that things don't have to be like *this*. We're in the midst of a very difficult time with corona virus, and the infection that we've seen through spreading as a pandemic throughout the world.

We are waiting - quite literally - for a vaccine, and there is hope in sight, as far as the science and technology is concerned. On a much larger scale there is a parallel anticipation and hope for Christians. We believe that there are many ills in our world and we long to see them put right. And we know that that can't come all at once, and it won't necessarily come tomorrow, but the Advent season is a time to prepare, to be ready.

Sometimes awake is a word that used, and we will be singing that word in a few moments, in the song that we will have. So, Advent is a time of anticipation. It's a time of hope; it's a time of looking forward, and it's a time of trust. A trust that holds that although things may seem difficult and challenging now, they do not necessarily have to be this way, and one day everything will be put right.

That's not a reason for gloom and despair, it is a reason for excitement and anticipation. So, I hope that despite all the limitations that you are going through now, that this season of Advent is one of excitement and anticipation for you. I hope that we will be able in some way to mark Christmas with our families. I hope that we will be able to find some joy in what has been quite a gloomy time for many of us. And I believe that the season of Advent is one that calls us to something bigger than that and deeper than that - to a joy and security that knows and trusts that in the ultimate scheme of things, God will look after us, God cares for us, and eventually all things will be put, right. We look forward in Advent hope to that day, whenever it will be.

Amen.