

Sermon on Advent Sunday, 27 November 2022 at St Mary's, Hertingfordbury & St Andrews by Melanie Seward, Lay Reader

Readings: Romans 13. 11-end & Matthew 24. 36-44



Rain check

British weather can be very changeable. Amongst the November sunny periods, we have had heavy rain this week. Maybe, you got caught in at least one heavy downpour and chose the wrong coat or forgot the umbrella. It is as well to keep an eye on the weather forecast and look at the sky before deciding whether to go out and how to go about it.

Our weather is a good metaphor for life - life is changeable. There can be stormy events that turn life upside down and long droughts when we lose our mojo. We can hit patches of fog or just meet a persistent drizzle when we lose our sense of

direction or even our inner well-being. Sometimes we can foresee these events whilst others just happen to us. All of us can get sucked into the known and the routine, never looking at the long-term forecast and how we might make different decisions and reshape our lives.

The Season of Advent says stop, think about your life. Stand back, take a look at the clouds and the sunny periods, listen to what God has to say. It is so easy to sleepwalk rather than live.

Today in Matthew's Gospel, we have Jesus preparing his disciples for his coming death: how should they live when he is no longer on earth. And we hear this passage with the knowledge of hindsight - Jesus does die on the cross and as Son of God transcends death that all may have everlasting life and the world be transformed. Jesus will return and the world as we know it will be recreated, so be watchful!

Jesus gives two images of the end of the world and judgement. Two people will be in the field; one will be taken and one will be left. Two women will be grinding meal together; one will be taken and one will be left. Jesus' words always have to be placed in the context of his whole ministry. Jesus has come that all should know the love of God and have everlasting life. The image is not designed to put the fear of God into us - but instead Jesus wants to shake us awake so that we grasp the urgency of his call for us to respond to God and thereby discern how we should live our lives. Be watchful.

Watchfulness includes both being alert **and** being ready. It involves the recognition that Jesus can return at any time. It

says in the text that even Jesus in his earthly ministry doesn't know the hour so, let's not get hung up about the when and how of Jesus' return and the judgement of the world. Instead let us think about God in the form of Father, Son and Holy Spirit being active in our lives and the world right now. Let us expect God to 'turn up' in our lives at any point and stay alert to how that might happen. If we take five minutes to read the parable of the Sheep and the Goats (in chapter 25) and remind ourselves that we will meet Jesus in those who are hungry, thirsty and unwell; we meet Jesus in those who are in need of clothing and hospitality or support as a result of imprisonment, then that in itself is instruction on staying alert. Readiness demands a willingness to share what we have and a consideration of what we can do to support.

The world in November 2022 is a place where many people are experiencing war and famine, floods and drought. It remains a world where many people have few human rights, suffering arbitrary arrest and imprisonment. In this country, people, including some of us, will be experiencing financial hardship and worries about food, heating, medical treatment and housing. The negative and disheartening political and economic news is casting a gloom over the lives of people.

If we believe that Jesus's death and rising from the dead has broken the power of suffering death, that God's kingdom on earth came with Jesus and will be fully complete when he comes again, then our wait for this completion will be characterised by hope. This hope in God's promise is transformative; touching our hearts, changing our attitudes and fuelling our actions. As individuals and as a community, we show the light of Christ by ministering to one another, human being to human being.

Paul writing to the early Christians in Rome exhorts them to, 'Lay aside the works of darkness and put on the armour of light', to 'put on Jesus Christ' and so 'live honourably'. It is the same urgent call to follow Jesus and be alert to God in our lives; prepare and get ready by praying, reading God's word, coming together in worship and the breaking of bread.

You might be familiar with the phrase 'to take a rain check'. It's about stopping and re-evaluating what you are doing and changing course. Advent jogs us into taking a rain check: How am I waiting for the completion of God's plan and the return of Jesus?

Or, put more simply: How do I prepare and get ready for meeting God in my life and the life of others - in my relationships, in work, in retirement, in the family and in the community? How can I or we change how we live and what we do so that we are able to respond in love and service?

This Advent, let us heed Jesus' call to be watchful. Let us all take a rain check; find time to re-evaluate how we live our lives.

There is a plan. And we are a part of it.

The world is changed by Jesus.

He calls us to live actively in hope and be part of the change.

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