

## Advent - Waiting

Jeremiah 33. 14-16

Luke 21. 25-36

Happy new year! Today is the start of the season of Advent in the church. Oh yes, we're beyond spring, summer, autumn and winter, we've got our own seasons - advent, Christmas, Epiphany! And you know its a new seasons because we change our colours - blue or purple.

Advent - strange word. What does it make you think - calendars maybe?

It actually means - Arrival - like that amazing album from Abba in 1976. Advent is the time when we think about the arrival of our saviour, Jesus arriving as a baby among us.

4 weeks of preparing for Christmas. The church loves to have a feast, a celebration - Easter, Christmas, but thinks you'll enjoy it more if we get the pre-match build up! If we anticipate a great event, we get more excited, more invested! The Strictly final would be nothing without the weeks and weeks before.

And we have to remember that before that first Christmas, people had been waiting for the messiah, for Christ, for a long time. Jeremiah's words today - *the days are surely coming, when a righteous branch from king David's line will rise up* - were written 600 years before Mary and Joseph started off to David's city for the census. 600 years - if that were a modern advent calendar I reckon thats quite a few tonnes of chocolate!

And when we think of Jesus coming among us a human. So we are reminded that he has gone back up to haven, and we are now waiting for his 2nd coming. His return.

His return and all that brings, the good, and the bad.

The bad - he comes with judgement

The good - he comes with judgement!

You see, I may not want to be judged, for I'm sure found wanting

But I do want all the wickedness and badness to be judged. All the wrongs to righted. All thats not fair to be made fair again.

So judgement - is a mixed bag

In the good old days - when you were young - the themes for advent weren't patriarchs, prophets, John the Baptist and Mary  
They brought that in to make it softer.  
From the middle ages the readings were all about - death, judgement, heaven and hell. that the cheery way they got ready for xmas in those days  
*(Story of getting a bishop to come and give them hell)*

And its there in our reading today from Luke -  
Jesus tells people - this is what happens when I return , *when "the Son of Man coming in a cloud" with power and great glory.* - be on your guard  
Be watching and waiting

So Advent is not just getting ready for xmas, but also getting ready for the 2nd coming - and we've been waiting for 2000 years already.

Which is why people something say that the season of advent is about  
**Waiting.**

Life is full of waiting -  
Waiting for peace in the middle east  
Waiting for bad people to get their just deserts  
Waiting for a parcel to be delivered, for my washing machine to be fixed,  
For a bus to come, for my kids to phone or get in touch,  
For the NHS to give me an appointment.

Waiting - for exam results or test results  
Waiting for a difficult meeting to be over  
Waiting for school to be over so we can work, waiting for work to be over so we can retire  
Waiting for retirement to be over.. oh wait a minute!

And the thing is we're not very good at waiting,  
We get frustrated, cross, blame others, blame ourselves.  
"Why are we waiting" goes the old song

And I don't think the world is helping - all this get it now, get it instantly  
We are full of instant gratification.  
Govt supposed to fix a problem immediately!  
Things have to turn round over night. Fixed straight away  
There seems to be no patience  
NowNow Now!

Which sounds a bit like a baby doesn't it?

Babies are notoriously bad at waiting! They are impatience personified.

They demand instant, immediate, complete gratification.

They have not learnt to live with unmet desires.

When a baby is hungry is to imagine they will never get fed.

When a baby is cold is to worry that there is no warmth

When a baby is not held or cuddled, is to fear they are unloved.

Of course, we don't want to be babies, we think we're much more grown up than that!

We know there is food coming, or we can get it ourselves, or go to the shops,

We can put a jumper on if we're cold, or turn the heating up.

we can even know someone loves us even when they are out of the room, or on the other side of the world.

So we think we've worked it out. WE're pretty smart

You see, what we do with those little fearful voices is we keep them quiet,

we tell them that we're in control of the food now - so nothing will go wrong.

That there's nothing to be scared of under the bed - I can shine the torch.

That people do love us, so we don't need to worry about it.

*pause*

But the funny thing is - as much as we try to drown it out, those fears and anxieties keep coming back - they're still there.

Like food - why do we eat so much? Why do we find it hard to eat less, to stop? Is it in part we're afraid there won't be any? And in the pandemic, or floods or any crisis - we panic buy food!

And then some of us deal with our food anxiety the other way. I won't eat. You can't make me. The toddler who refuses. The teenager who won't eat. The adult, who has to be in control.

Yes there are no monsters under the bed, we're so clever to work that out - but what about that lump, that niggly pain - and the doctors literally shine a light inside - but what will they find. How anxious are we?

So we find we can't keep the fears out with our brains, or keeping it all in control, so then we turn up the noise, the distraction, keep ourselves busy - the to do lists, the obsessional hobby, afternoon TV - anything to keep the worries away.

What I'm trying to say, probably not very well, is that we don't like waiting, because it stops all those distractions and ways we have of not hearing that fear inside - and when we wait, we get anxious, we get worried, and that's why we don't like waiting, and are so bad at it.

I wonder if that's why people start to celebrate Christmas early, - because they just can't stand the waiting. And that's why we don't want to start early, it gives us longer to wait.

And the thing is - we are waiting **for** something. This is not pointless waiting - we are looking forward to celebrating Christmas, and to thinking of Jesus return.

And there will be relief, when Christmas does come, when Jesus returns, and when the waiting is over.

But then it just sounds as if waiting is like some punishment or some painful thing God makes us do, or people do, just to make us uncomfortable. You can have cake, but you've got to wait till next Tuesday!

But maybe.. there is something in the waiting...

I hope you've stayed awake and waited this long, because here comes the point of the sermon - last 2 minutes..

In the bible there is lots of waiting -

The martyrs in the book of revelation, waiting for the lords return - how long o lord, they cry.

Jesus dead for 3 days - Mary and the disciples waiting for his resurrection

Jesus about to start his ministry, has to wait in the desert for 40 days

The exile in Babylon, waiting 70 years before they can return and rebuild the temple

The 40 years they waited, walking in circles in the desert, before they could enter the promised land.

These are not random events, or just 'what happened next' - the Bible is the story of god and his people, and waiting is a recurring theme. Not in a cliff hanger, you'll never guess what happened way - but it serves a purpose. God doesn't do anything by accident or with no reason.

Isaiah 40 says - those who wait on the lord, will renew their strength

Psalm 46 - says - be still, and know that I am god

Psalm 37 - be still before the lord and wait

Micah 7 - But as for me, I will look to the Lord; I will wait for the God of my salvation; my God will hear me.

This is not by chance. This is again and again and again!  
This is not waiting to building the excitement. Not delaying gratification to make the relief better. Phew I'm glad the waitings over.

Waiting, in the Kingdom of God, does something to us - when we are forced to stop, and if we can bear it and do it right.

To turn away from all those distracting things, to recognise the crutches we rely on to keep our fears at bay. And to turn back to god.

The 40 years in the wilderness was because they didn't trust God, and a new generation had to grow up, relying on the manna, and on God, rather than themselves.

The exile in Babylon was about them discarding foreign gods and turning away from idols to the one true God.

Jesus preparation in the desert was his recognition of who he was, and who the real battle was with.

And so on.

When God asks us to wait or makes us wait - it is to transform us. If we let it.

He wants us to trust him.

Abraham and Sarah have to wait till their 90's to have a child, and to have a destination. They are called the Founders of the Faith - faith - which means trust. In the depth of their waiting, they learnt to Trust. Even when there was no earthly way to have children, even when they were told to sacrifice that miraculous child, even when they had no clue where they were going. They learnt to Trust.

Because in the end - that's what a baby has to do with its fears too.  
It has to trust that its mum or carer will return and feed it.  
That mum or whoever is there to warm it up.  
That it is loved, even when it can't see who is loving it.

Maybe this Advent, this time of waiting - can do the same for us.  
That we might learn how good our heavenly father is.  
That God will feed us, provide and protect us, and that he loves us, and we  
do not need to worry.

#### Psalm 131

I have not a proud heart, nor a proud eye,  
I have no concern for things too great for me  
I have stilled my soul, like a well-fed child  
Like a well fed child at its mothers breast  
My hope, my trust, is in the Lord  
from this time on, and for evermore.