



Sermon: - 27th November 2016

WHAT ARE WE WAITING FOR?

Isaiah 2:1 – 5; Matthew 24: 31 – 44

It's Advent. The beginning of the Christian year. This is the Christian New Year, in a sense. The point at which the liturgical year begins. It's a neglected season, although that is changing, but it would be a great pity to forget it, because the message of Advent is one of hope and reconciliation, and it is so very apt for this world in which we live, and particularly at the moment when it seems that relationships all over the world are breaking down. Advent is traditionally a time of waiting and expectation. We open the windows of advent calendars, as we count down to Christmas. We light the candles on an advent wreath, we have more services as we worship more frequently. And services have more joy about them, days are full of light and colour as decorations sparkle and fairy lights twinkle, an antidote to the dark days of winter. Children become ever more excited as they count the remaining days till Christmas and the arrival of Santa. Adults become ever more fevered in their preparations, shopping... cooking... cleaning. There is a growing sense of expectation, or perhaps despair, depending on what Christmas holds for you. But I hope that excitement is the prevailing emotion because it's a time of looking forward...of anticipation...of waiting...It's Advent. ... but what are we waiting for?

On one level we are waiting for a baby. We are looking forward with hope to the birth of the son of God and Mary. The child who will bring peace and a new relationship with God. As the angel sang; peace on earth, goodwill to all. Isaiah says, They will beat their swords into ploughshares, and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation will not take up sword against nation, nor will they train for war anymore.

In the birth of the Christ child, God promises reconciliation with humanity, but he also sent Jesus to show us what that would look like. The birth of Jesus was an announcement; not only of our salvation and God's love for us, but also that the time had come for the kingdom of God to be made real on earth. Jesus brought a message of peace and hope and love. Jesus described for us the kingdom of God as he showed forgiveness to sinners, acceptance and compassion and healing to those who sought him out, the poor, the voiceless, the marginalised...and also sometimes the rich and powerful, when they realised that their power and riches were for this life only and, contrary to what everyone else might think, they too were in need of the healing touch of Jesus. Jesus came to say... "This is what it means to live with God at the centre...it means you are not condemned for the wrong you do, it means you are rescued from the margins, it means that you can hope for a better future,...it means that abundant life can be yours, a life not based on wealth and riches, or the pursuit of wealth and riches, but on a relationship of peace with your creator and your neighbour." The birth of Jesus was an announcement...God loves you, and this is how he wants you to love him back.

It's Advent.....what are we waiting for? We are waiting for a baby.

It's Advent.....what are we waiting for? Jesus coming as a baby? But Jesus has come, and has gone, yet still we wait. What are we waiting for? We are also waiting for the second coming.

We are waiting for Jesus to come again in power, however we might understand that. One of the hopes that we have as Christians, one of the theological realities that we live with, is the belief that God will one day introduce a new age of peace and reconciliation. That there is more to life than this life with its trials and problems. Matthew tells us ... So you also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him.

At Advent, as well as remembering the promise of the Christ Child, a birth awaited with wonder and excitement, we celebrate Christ's promise to return. We think about his coming, and we think about his second coming although, like many of the biblical promises, we cannot understand or know exactly what that means. Our theology of hope tells us that when Jesus comes again, however and whenever that happens, God's reign of peace will be a reality. No more will it be something we hope for, or glimpse through a glass, darkly, or pray for with faith but perhaps without much expectation. At the first advent we awaited the birth of the prince of Peace. At every advent since then we have awaited his return to take up his throne and inaugurate the reign of peace.

It's Advent, what are we waiting for? We are waiting for the Prince of Peace to come in Power.

It's Advent.....what are we waiting for? We are waiting for a baby and the Prince of peace.

In other words, we are waiting for the advent of the Kingdom of God.

Matthew tells us, That is how it will be at the coming of the Son of Man. Two men will be in the field; one will be taken and the other left. Two women will be grinding with a hand mill; one will be taken and the other left. "Therefore keep watch, because you do not know on what day your Lord will come."

Both the coming of Jesus and the second coming of Jesus signal the coming of God's kingdom. In the birth of Jesus God stooped to touch the earth, to take it once more in his hands and surround it with his forgiving love. He announced his intention to rebuild his creation as he had originally planned it. He gave us the opportunity... and the tools to create his kingdom of love and peace here on earth. And in the second coming, the bible tells us, he will finally usher in the age of peace. So in advent, we remember the first coming of Jesus, and all that that promised, and look forward to the second coming of Jesus and the fulfilment of that promise, however that might be accomplished, when God will end suffering for ever.

It's Advent, what are we waiting for? We are waiting for the Kingdom of God to become a reality in our lives and our world.

It's Advent.....what are we waiting for? What magic will make God's reign of peace a reality in our lives? What miracle will put an end to suffering and violence and war? Isaiah gives us a clue, "Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the temple of the God of Jacob. He will teach us his ways, so that we may walk in his paths." As we grow in faith, and learn how to be better disciples, this is the Kingdom of God. That we display the faith, the hope and the love that Jesus came to show us. We have the seeds of God's kingdom, right here in our hands... In the deeds we do. Right here in our mouths...in the words we say. Right here in our hearts...in what we believe and how we let our faith affect our actions.

It's Advent.....what are we waiting for? It's our faith and our love and our constancy in prayer, our faithfulness and our commitment, our compassion and willingness to forgive one another, to love one another to work alongside one another... that will build the kingdom of God. The Kingdom of God, Advent tells us, is not some far off distant hope, but can be a present reality. But only if we make it so. Only if we take seriously God's gift of love to us and follow his example. Only if we determine that the waiting will have an outcome and a purpose beyond the celebration of the birth of a baby 2000 years ago.

Advent, when we look forward to a moment when strangers call "happy Christmas" to one another in the street. Advent, when a game of football takes place in no man's land. Advent, the anticipation of the season of peace and goodwill from God to earth.

This is the time of hope, when we look forward to a better tomorrow, the coming of the kingdom of God. But this better tomorrow will not happen, and hope will be disappointed, if we are not prepared to live the kingdom here and now in our daily lives. And this is the time for us to consider and think and pray, how might I make a difference? It's Advent...In our hope and preparation let this be our prayer.....let there be peace on earth and let it begin with me

It's Advent...what are we waiting for?