

## ADVENT SUNDAY HOMILY

GIVEN BY FR NIGEL PRIOR

Last Wednesday, I led two primary schools' acts of collective worship as they are now called – a pre-Advent pep-talk really. But imagine if I had chosen today's Gospel reading? One Head said to me 'Please can we include a Christmas carol or two which we are learning?' and I thought, mmh..... Advent is still misunderstood, or even by-passed by many; and it is certainly understandable that the four Last Things – Death, Judgement, Heaven and Hell – are easily passed by in the context of young children.

Luke pictures a tsunami to terrify the strongest soul and predicts an apocalypse to uproot the greenest fig tree, the driest desert, the biggest shopping centre or housing estate. And yet we can easily identify with such disasters from our own TV headlines today: from devastating fires in Greece and California to irreparable and ongoing damage to the beautiful coral of the Great Barrier reef because of climate change. Prince Charles was right to speak out again just last week:

"We are the first generation to understand that we are destroying our world. We are the last to do something about it."

I am sure Dr Luke would agree with our tackling these pressing environmental issues instead of denying them or ignoring them. I could even imagine him standing on the same platform as our future King urging us all to take more seriously the urgency of caring for all our futures on planet earth.

But our Gospel today is saying something more radical than that: we are waiting for Christ's SECOND Coming, and only then will we see the justice and righteousness of God face to face. We must be ready for that day and hold our heads up high. There will be judgement certainly, but not terror. And for our Christian understanding, fear will be replaced by redemption; our redemption that is approaching when God-in-Christ comes again to save us.

But I hear a different cry..... Isn't this your busiest time of year, Vicar? .....well yes, we **are** busy in this pre-Christmas rush, but Luke is asking us to stop and tarry a while. This exciting new season searches us to ask and find out more about the 'purple' side of Advent, that waiting and contemplative 'mix' which focuses on Christ coming back to meet us and take us home.

In Kendal in the summer, I did actually see one of those walking 'billboards' declaring that 'the end is nigh', but instead of feeling fearful, I felt sorry for the person carrying that message. And that's what I most want to say in this homily today: a faith which instils fear instead of hope; of doom and gloom instead of quiet, confident anticipation, is only a faith buried in sand. Although it may be a very adult message, St Luke wants us to know for ourselves that God calls each of us by name, and that we are precious in his eyes. St Luke wants our faith to be built on rock. However many distractions there are with our everyday worries or busy-ness, and despite our failures and sinfulness, we **are** redeemed. We can look forward to T.S.Eliot's famous 'leap of faith':

"In my end is my beginning."

However we understand the Second Coming, we need to accept God's intention and energy which is, and was, the same at our baptism. From the beginning, God embraced and comforted us and, yes, redeemed us.

Our Advent faith looks forward to the end days when God's embrace becomes more fully alive... as if to say: 'Did you ever doubt my promises to you?'

At tonight's carol service we take again that chosen, symbolic journey from darkness to light, doubt to trust, praying for faithfulness to our baptism call which, in Christ's company and fellowship, leads us **from** glory **to** glory. Come and join us! In the name....

Amen.

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