



## Reflection: Advent Begins ...

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This Sunday is the beginning of Advent, which runs until Christmas Day, which then begins the Christmas celebrations. In today's society, it is very hard to mark this time well, so I thought I would introduce the season and touch on two themes that will appear with frequency – waiting and judgement.

Advent is a season of waiting with expectation and preparation, as the Church prepares to celebrate the coming (*adventus*) of God in Christ coming into the world as a human being (the incarnation), and also looks ahead to his final advent as judge at the end of time. The readings and liturgies in this period, reflect these themes.

The great prayer of Advent is '**Maranatha**' – '**Our Lord, come**' (1 Corinthians 16.22) but I wonder if we have the most helpful images running in our mind when we consider this?

Do we fear Christ's return as judge? Do we conceive of this as being about being naughty or good? Does the words of Charles Wesley's striking hymn 'Lo, He Comes with Clouds Descending' project a terrifying image?

*Every eye shall now behold him  
robed in dreadful majesty.*

Advent, unlike Lent, is not a penitential season – it is one of expectation. For those of you who have participated in our Morning Prayer or Compline in recent weeks will know we have tapped into the Celtic inspired tradition and Morning Prayer will adopt a Celtic style for the season of Advent.

One of the Celtic 'greats' was Cuthbert and Sister Benedicta Ward writing on his life said, 'By spirituality then, I mean what Cuthbert himself thought and said and did and prayed in the light of the gospel of Christ.'

So, I want to consider how we live Advent. In this season of waiting, we can make an obvious connection with the pandemic – we are waiting for this season of physical separation and COVID-19 restrictions to end. We can more easily identify with the sense the frustration of the early church, desperate for the return of Christ to end the pain and suffering in the world.

However, this season of waiting is not meant to be passive – we need to live in the light of Christ’s return.

I argue for a holistic spirituality which impacts on how we live, what we think, what we say, what we do, how we pray so that we embracing and incarnating the gospel in our everyday life. The gospel is literally good news for all creation, so how does this work in practice? I suggest it is rooted in our relationship with God, filled with the Holy Spirit, that leads to transformative living in the here and now, in the light of our future hope.

Let’s take a famous judgement passage, Matthew 25:31-46:

***“For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in,<sup>36</sup> I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.”***

While this is action orientated, we need to remember that it flows from their relationship with God. In the same Gospel (Matthew 22:36-40) we have:

***<sup>36</sup> ‘Teacher, which commandment in the law is the greatest?’<sup>37</sup> He said to him, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.”<sup>38</sup> This is the greatest and first commandment. <sup>39</sup> And a second is like it: “You shall love your neighbour as yourself.”<sup>40</sup> On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.’***

The first and greatest commandment is to love the Lord your God with our whole being – a holistic spirituality, which then flows into love for our neighbour and ourselves. The relationship with God is the energy source....and this is reflective of the Triune God who is community. The creation and redemption of the cosmos flows from that relationship.

So, St Paul’s will grow as we enable people to encounter and grow in love of God AND in living a holistic spirituality that is good news for themselves and for people both inside and outside the church.

One of the signs of the kingdom, will be that we help to dismantle oppressive systems and structures. I noticed this helpful reflection from Richard Rohr’s daily meditation speaks powerfully to the racial (and indigenous) justice dimensions. [https://cac.org/mertons-call-for-racial-justice-2020-11-27/?utm\\_source=cm&utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_campaign=dm&utm\\_content=summary](https://cac.org/mertons-call-for-racial-justice-2020-11-27/?utm_source=cm&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=dm&utm_content=summary)

Advent might well be served by considering some ‘justice’ passages and what our response will be as a result.

***“Give justice to the weak and the fatherless; maintain the right of the afflicted and the destitute,” (Psalm 82:3).***

***“Learn to do good; seek justice, correct oppression; bring justice to the fatherless, and please the widow’s cause,” (Isaiah 1:17).***

***“He has told you, O man, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?” (Micah 6:8).***

***“But woe to you Pharisees! For you tithe mint and rue and every herb, and neglect justice and the love of God. These you ought to have done, without neglecting the others,” (Luke 11:42).***

So, we will journey in this weird Advent time together and I look forward with expectation as to how our lives and the lives of others will be transformed as a result.

With love,

~ Philip