



# Sunday Reflection Sunday Reflection Ordinary Time



in the Charges of St Margarets, Renfrew  
& St Johns, Johnstone

For Sunday 3 December 2023

# Advent Sunday

**This week the preacher is Lisa at St Johns  
and Rev Godfred at St Margaret.  
The Rectors reflection follows and may be  
used at St Margarets**

On the first day of the Church's year, the Gospel urges us to keep awake. God's kingdom is coming, and we do not know the day or hour. Although the words are challenging, we are assured that God is with us and the Son of Man will come with glory.

## **Curate Lisa at St Johns**

**Gospel Reflection Advent Sunday  
3 December 2023, St John's, Johnstone**

Today we start to prepare for the coming of our Lord. It is a special time – a time for us to savour and reflect, rather than to count down the days.

*Beware, keep alert; for you do not know when the time will come. (Mark 13.33)*

### **An illustration to set the scene**

Remember Michael Fish, the BBC weatherman? He was the longest serving meteorologist at the BBC but, unfortunately, he is remembered for one fateful moment. Broadcasting on 15 October 1987, a few hours before the Great Storm - the worst in over 300 years - he said "Earlier on today, apparently, a woman rang the BBC and said she heard there was a [hurricane](#) on the way. Well, if you're watching, don't worry, there isn't!". The phrase, a "Michael Fish moment" is now apparently applied to public forecasts, on any topic, which turn out to be embarrassingly wrong. Forecasters of all stripes, beware!

### **Today's Gospel teaching**

Jesus had some very strong messages for his disciples and Mark is particularly graphic in conveying what Jesus had to say about the end times. In those days there was strong vein of apocalyptic teaching and writing – warnings about the end times Jesus reminds his listeners that as the Christ, his coming is of cosmic significance. Moreover, it extends beyond the time of the life of Jesus of Nazareth – God's son will be part of the final judgement and restoration of the whole earth.

He tells his disciples that, to use a modern term, they must 'live with the end in mind,' that is, the purpose for which the world has been created. It is too easy to think that today is all there is. In dramatic language Jesus paints a picture of the world-shattering events to come. He wants his disciples to take the long view and to live in the present with a sense of time moving to its ultimate fulfilment. Jesus' words are given context by Isaiah. For such fulfilment means an affirmation of God's promises. However violent the storm, God promises to come. This is not all

there is. There is hope that God's love and justice will break into the world anew.

But when? Jesus says that it is not for us to know. That means that we must live with one foot in the present and the other ready to move on. Don't get too comfortable here. Be ready, when you least expect it, for the disturbance of the Holy Spirit, for God to break into your life, for the ordinary to become strange and the impossible to be near at hand.

### **Applying the teaching to our own lives**

One of the things that is special about being part of a faith community is our experience of time and seasons.

It's particularly obvious at this time of year. Yes, we may be as frantic as the next person trying to get presents or trips or food organised for Christmas, or managing the expectations of youngsters, but we're also living in another timeframe, which offers a different way of understanding what this season is about. For the church universal provides a story, rich with meaning, as we journey through the year and the years.

Because there are two kinds of time. The time you can measure with your watch ('chronos' time in Greek) – this is the anxiety-making time, the clock-ticking time, the time that says, 'only so many shopping days to Christmas,' the time that runs away from us. And then there is the time of deeper significance, the slow time, ('kairos' time) where we experience truths that go beyond our day-to-day experience and lift us to share across time and space. The incarnation is such a moment in time where we touch into the mystery of God amongst us, and it will be as every year and yet particular to this year.

We wait with hope as much as the child drawing up their lists for Santa. But Advent longings are so much more profound than those for the gift that will in time be grown out of, handed down or broken. Because in Advent we are waiting not only for the coming of God as a vulnerable

baby, but for the triumphant coming of God's Son in glory as God finally remakes the world.

And so, Advent is a time when we can bring to God our longing for the renewal and restoration of the world:

*O that you would tear open the heavens and come down* (Isaiah 64.1, the opening of the Old Testament reading set for today).

As we look at the state of our planet and our world, we long for it to be remade into God's Kingdom and in Advent we look forward *in hope* to that renewal, however bad the signs and warnings.

And we bring our longing for salvation: we are people who are not content with things as they are. From our baptism we have laid ourselves open to be transformed like clay in the potter's hand, As we await the coming of the Christ child we wait for the renewal and reaffirmation of that relationship with God in Jesus that makes us. And we know that this transformation begins in our hearts. So, Advent is a time for reflection and prayer – that as God comes closer to us, so we may try to come closer to God.

The way we celebrate Advent in church and as a faith community feeds our longing for mystery, to be shown that there is something beyond ourselves. Take the image of light which runs through the whole of Advent.

*O Radiant Dawn,*

*splendour of eternal light, sun of justice:*

*come and shine on those who dwell in darkness and in the shadow of death.* ('O' Antiphon for 21<sup>st</sup> December).

The coming Jesus is the light of the world who scatters the darkness in the world and in our souls, Our readings tell of it,

*Restore us, O God of hosts;*

*let your face shine, that we may be saved* (from today's Psalm – 80.7).

We are shown it in the contrast between our violet hangings and the warmth candlelight, darkness penetrated by light, life in death.

Finally, Advent again discloses the longing of God to reveal Godself to us, to share in *our* experience and to be alongside us. That longing became real in the incarnation of his Son, memorably captured by RS Thomas in his poem, *The Coming*. God calls his Son to look at the world:

*And God held in his hand  
A small globe. Look he said.*

The poem tells how they see a scorched landscape and a sad people and ends with the Son's desire to be with the people of earth:

*The son watched  
Them. Let me go there, he said.*

Time past is close to us in Advent and yet time future is rushing towards us. It takes faith to hold those things in balance and there are times, and it may be ones of those in our world just now, when it is hard to keep a sense of hope alive. We wait in the present because we know there is more and greater to come. The incarnation reminds us that God is faithful. God will, God does come. And while modern physics may be catching up with the playfulness of time, the mystery of God's coming then, now and to come, will not be revealed by better forecasting, but only through trusting immersion in the life of prayer and the experience of God's love in communion and community. Keep watch for the hope that is in the midst of darkness.

*Beware, keep alert; for you do not know when the time will come. (Mark 13.33)*

## **Rev Godfred at St Margarets**

**“But about that day or hour no one knows, neither the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. Beware, keep alert, for you do not know when the time will come”. (Mark 13:32-33)**

This statement by Jesus to his disciples is part of his last words to them before his bodily departure from this earth. It was meant to create in his disciples a sense of self-awareness as they go about their daily lives on earth, so not to be taken by surprise the changing events of time. It is a statement that compels a person to do self-examination, self-assessment to come to self-realisation of whether one is living his or her life according to the purpose and will of God to manifest the kingdom values on earth. It is to help us to redeem the time by living a meaningful and purposeful, responsible and fulfilling life on earth in loving service to God and humanity.

### **THEME: GOD DEMANDS FROM US RESPONSIBLE LIVING AS CHILDREN OF HIS KINGDOM**

To beware and keep alert is to be on your guard, watch out, be careful and be cautious in life. Again it is to be on the lookout, keep your eyes open, to tread carefully, watch your step and think twice before making decisions. It is for us to pay full attention to things around us to inform our decision making and prepare to be able to deal with anything that might happen as we go through the challenges of life.

Dear people of God, life is like the different scenes of a play, which you are given opportunity to act your part while on earth, and when your time is up which you may not know when in most times, but you may see the warning signs as you grow in age, you leave the scene for others to come. The reality of life is that the actual day or hour may be asked to leave the scene of this life on earth we may not know. But when gone, what we will be remembered for is the good relationship we had with others, the lives we helped to transform, the hope we gave to others, the change we brought to the lives of others, the love we demonstrated and the good service we rendered to humanity and society at large. Jesus is also reminding us as children of God's Kingdom as he did to the disciples to live our lives responsibly by not taking anything for granted in life, because there is an end to everything under the sun, whether good or bad and a period for accountability of our stewardship of the life which was given to us. So we are being admonished to be sensitive to the happenings around us and be mindful of the decision and choices we make, bearing in mind that we have an aim or goal to achieve at the end.

Beloved in Christ, our inability to know the day and the hour, is an indication of the limitation of human intelligence, wisdom and scientific knowledge to always correctly predict the happenings of the future. This therefore demands proper and responsible utilization of human and material resources available to us for the sake of the unpredictable future so not to be regretful in life. Not knowing when the time will come brings to mind the indefinite continuous progress of existence and events in the past, present and future. The present happenings of wars around us, the pressure on the health care system due to increasing health complications that demands complex treatment, the increasing emotional and psychological disorder among people, unpredictable climate change, increasing poverty related deaths are all sources of concern. Therefore the words of Jesus to us in this period of advent is; keep watch, live responsibly, do good and pray, for you do not know the day or the hour. May God bless us all.

## **Rector's reflection which may be used at St Margarets**

**“And what I say to you I say to all: Keep awake.”**

Mark 13:37

### **Illustration to set the scene for our thinking**

There are many brands and styles of alarm clocks designed to help us get out of bed in the morning.

Some people wake to beeping or ringing at a set time; others to the radio – you might prefer political argument or music.

Parents of young children are alerted to the morning by cries or scampering about, or (possibly the worst way to be

hoiked out of sleep) a voice calling, *“Mummy, I think I’m going to be sick!”*

In days gone by, a village might designate someone the *“knocker-upper”*, the person who went around banging the doors and windows of their neighbours to rouse them.

Few of us like being woken from slumber, and in the darker mornings many of us might prefer to hibernate under the duvet.

But the day has begun, and we cannot stay in bed for ever.

We have matters to attend to, and work to do.

We have people that need us, and the day to enjoy.

We will be fine once we are moving; it is the harsh and insistent alarm call, waking us, that we dislike.

We are dislodged from comfort and warmth, pushed out of slumber, into the reality of life.

## **Gospel Teaching we can take from the texts**

Jesus opens today’s Gospel reading with the words, *“in those days”*.

We might be forgiven for imagining that he is speaking of a vague time in the distant future.

There will be a cosmic event at some point, and then the Son of Man will come, dramatically, from heaven.

This is the sort of universe-shaking event that the prophet Isaiah is seeking in our Old Testament reading today, when he looks around at the sinful nature of the people and cries, **“O that you would tear open the heavens and come down.”**

Perhaps we long for this sort of divine drama ourselves – we want God to appear, right now, and put the world right.



But what follows in Jesus' teaching suggests that, although there will be an end-of-time event, we still need to pay attention now, in the present, because we cannot know when, or how, God will act.

All that we can do is be awake and alert and ready.

And because we cannot know the precise time, the implication is that we must be always ready.

We are to be as attentive to what God is doing all around us, in the present, as we are to the fig tree and the seasons.

God is not some distant being, waiting for a time before acting.

God is acting now.

The kingdom of God, as Mark tells us in the very first chapter of his Gospel, **"is at hand"**.

We need to wake up and pay attention.

## **Application of the teaching to our lives and praying**

Advent is the beginning of the Church's year.

It is our wake-up call, our alarm.

Watch, wake up, look and listen.

Listen to what?

To God, of course.

But how, and where, and what does God sound like?

What is God saying?

Just as it is tempting to press the snooze button in the morning, snuggle further into the duvet and ignore the day ahead, it is tempting to think that God speaks only in our

comfortable places, in our prayers, our lovely carols, our church.

But when Jesus points out the dead fig tree, and speaks of the master coming suddenly and unexpectedly, he tells us that God is here, in the unexpected and even the disruptive and disturbing places.

What has the world around us got to share about the kingdom as it breaks in?

Where are the unwelcome, jarring, jolting signals, calling us to action, to justice and mercy?

Beyond the Church, beyond our comfortable world, God is saying, "Wake up"; "Pay attention."

Sometimes we need to be woken up to injustice, intolerance, ignorance.

Sometimes God calls in the voices of people we do not expect – telling us things that we would rather not hear.

Perhaps Advent is a time to pay greater attention to the clarion call of the kingdom beyond the familiar comfort of church, and rouse ourselves to work for God's justice, wherever it is needed.

**"And what I say to you I say to all: Keep awake."**

Mark 13:37

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