

Sermon December 1 Advent Sunday

Matthew 24:36-44

Last week we were talking about the crucifixion and I made the comment that it felt a little strange to be talking about this as Advent was about to get under way. Well, today I want to draw a parallel between Advent Sunday and Easter Sunday. Easter Sunday is all about new beginnings, and in many ways, so is Advent Sunday. It is the beginning of a celebration of a life that transformed our world. It is the beginning of a celebration of a life that has huge implications for our church and for us as Christians. Just as Lent is a time when we prepare ourselves for the momentous events of Easter, so Advent is a time when we prepare ourselves for this momentous birth.

The question we have to ask ourselves is, Where are we in our relationship with Jesus Christ? As we join in this world-wide celebration, what does it really mean to us? The point is, these celebrations will have a far greater significance for us if we are comfortable with that relationship. It will mean so much more to us.

We are standing on the threshold of two worlds, a world which rejects Jesus and everything that he stands for, or a world which embraces Christ. This is a world which has the hallmarks of love, forgiveness, kindness and service. The choice is ours which world we embrace. Every day we make a myriad of choices. Let me put a few to you. Would you prefer to work in the garden or go for a long walk? To see the film or read the book? To eat out or have dinner at home? To play the sport or watch it? Now these are probably not the most important choices you will make, but the choice we make in terms of which world we buy into is massive. It will determine the sort of people we are; it will determine our behaviour; it will determine just what our priorities are.

Let us spend a few minutes having a look at our Gospel reading. At first glance, it appears that Jesus is talking about his second coming – *'When the Son of Man returns'....* (verse 37). This may well be the case, though there is some debate on this. It could possibly mean when we come face to face with him in the next life. However, I tend to think he is referring to his second coming to earth simply because of his reference to it being a time of some turmoil. He references the Flood, when, of course, there was widespread loss of virtually everything, including life. He speaks of, *'Two men working in the field; one will be taken, the other left. Two women will be grinding flour at the mill; one will be taken, the other left.'* This ties in with the Jewish belief that the coming of the Messiah will be preceded by some sort of apocalypse.

Whatever Jesus is referring to, he makes one point very clear. We must be prepared for the moment when we meet him, and in a very real sense, we meet Jesus at Christmas. We must have our house in order.

I am fortunate to be married to someone who is very house proud. As you can imagine, with four quite active children our house can, at times, take on the appearance of the recent recipient of a tornado. We do have visitors now and again, and before they come Mervis will ensure that the house is extremely tidy, in fact, bordering on the pristine. There is a limit what you can do in a limited space of time with holes in the wall, graffiti etc but overall the place is immaculate. Trust me, this is no mean feat.

In the same way, Jesus is making the point that we must have our house in order, and he is specifically referring to himself as the visitor. *'You also must be ready all the time. For the Son of Man will come when least expected.'* Verse 44.

The most effective or compelling way we can be ready is to ensure, as I mentioned earlier, that our relationship with Christ is secure and strong. Having our house in order can really only mean one thing – to have our relationship with Christ in order. Are we confident in that relationship? This, also, is no mean feat.

I want to share a little story with you. You may or may not remember the Columbine High School massacre in Colorado in 1999, when two male students went on a murderous rampage, killing 12 fellow students and a teacher. The first student to be shot was a girl, her name was Rachel Scott. Rachel was a Christian. The killers taunted her about her faith and challenged her to proclaim her faith, which she had no hesitation in doing so. So they shot her. A fellow student beside her said he didn't believe. He was spared.

What would we do if we were in Rachel's shoes? Would our faith be so strong that we would be prepared to own it in the face of such threatening danger? Would we have the conviction to affirm our faith when our lives could well depend on our answer? I guess we would never really know unless we are put in that situation. It is a question I often ask myself and it is a question I cannot put my hand on my heart and answer in the affirmative. I do hope I would but who knows?

As we prepare to hear the Christmas story, Christ's story, all over again; as we prepare to sing our favourite carols and to enter into the Christmas spirit of goodwill and good living, (*you can't have Christmas spirit without good living!*) we need to make sure of two things. Firstly,

that our house is in order in terms of our relationship with Christ, and secondly, that we make choices to live well, and by that I mean appropriately, in preparation of renewing our relationship with Christ.

In finishing, I put this choice or question to you – What would you do differently if you knew that Jesus was coming back tomorrow? The answer to that question should cloak what we do day in and day out, right now. That is very much what Jesus is telling us.

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