

Sermon Advent Sunday 26 November 2022

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 Advent is under way and 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 Christ? As we join in this world-wide celebration, what does it really mean to us? The point is, these celebrations will have far greater significance for us if we are comfortable with that relationship. It will mean so much more for us.

We are standing on the threshold of two worlds, a world which rejects Christ and everything he stands for, and a world which embraces Christ. This is a world which has the hallmarks of love, forgiveness, kindness and service. The choice is ours as to which world we embrace.

Every day we make a myriad of choices, some perhaps not quite as significant as others. Let me give you a few examples. Do we work in the garden or do we go for a long walk? Do we get up at 5.00am or 7.00am? Do we do the Christmas shopping this weekend or do we go the beach? Do I cook on the barbecue this evening or do I get Mervis to cook in the frying pan? Now these are not life-changing choices we make, by any stretch of the imagination, and are probably determined by the mood we are in, 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 moments having a look at our Gospel reading. At first glance, it appears that Jesus is talking about his second coming – *'For as the days of Noah were, so will the coming of the Son of Man.'* (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 turmoil.

He references the flood, when of course, there was widespread loss of virtually everything, including life. He speaks of, *'Two men who will be in the field; one will be taken and one will be left. Two women will be grinding meal together; one will be taken and one will be 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 (*I could substitute the adjective 'quite' for something a little stronger*), our house can, at times, take on the appearance of the recent recipient of a tornado. We do have visitors from time to time, and before they come Mervis will ensure that the house is extremely tidy. There is a limit to what one can do in a limited space of time with holes in the wall and graffiti etc, but overall the place is quite 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. *'Therefore you must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an unexpected hour.'*

There is one small but quite significant difference in the analogy of tidying up our home before the visitors come and this edict from Jesus, and it lies in the word 'unexpected.' It is one thing to have the kids' mess cleaned up when we know that visitors are coming at a certain time. It is another thing completely to be ready for Jesus when he comes unexpectedly. That means, of course, that our house should be in order at all times, because we just don't know when we will come face to face with Christ.

Now the most effective or compelling way we can be ready is to ensure 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 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. When I read stories like that, I invariably ask myself, what would I do in that situation? Bottom line is I am not too sure. I hope I would have the courage to make a stand for my faith but who knows? Hopefully, I won't have to find out.

As we prepare to hear the Christmas story, Christ's tory, 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 really have Christmas spirit without good living, can you?), 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 for the renewing of our relationship with Christ.

In finishing, I put this 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.