



First Sunday of Advent

2nd December 2012

*Jeremiah 33:14-16, Psalm 25: 1-10, 1 Thessalonians 3:9-13,
Luke 21:25-38*

In the name of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, Amen

Being Advent 1, the start of a new Church year, we have an opportunity to contemplate what such a new beginning might hold for us, what is the promise that is held today? Advent is also our preparation for Christmas, we are being drawn toward the reality of Christmas.

Whichever way we look at Advent it seems to be addressing the process of change, through endings, beginnings, and imminent arrivals. Advent has a sense of movement and calls us to attend to our own life movement. It is a time to know again that things do not remain as they are, to realise that we change and the world changes. If tomorrow is the same as today we should seriously question our reality; and if tomorrow is devoid of promise then we should also question our faith.

Jeremiah speaks with a confidence that has been recorded/accepted as a prophetic certainty; *“The days are surely coming, says the LORD, when I will fulfil the promise I made to the house of Israel and the house of Judah.*

15 In those days and at that time I will cause a righteous Branch to spring up for David; and he shall execute justice and righteousness in the land.”

The early Church developed an orthodox understanding of prophesy that read back into such prophetic texts a prediction of Jesus, and so there was an understanding that Jesus was the one who Jeremiah predicted in his prophesy. Jesus was the *“righteous Branch to spring up for David.”*

Another more contemporary understanding is to see Jesus as one who lived intentionally with an orientation to the prophetic certainty. Jesus is not the realisation of Jeremiah’s prediction, rather, he intentionally lives in the light of the same certainty, the same faith, the same worldview that Jeremiah voiced. It is an important distinction, for sacred texts seek to give voice to a living truth, a life truth that is eternal, and so can be heard by everyone in every age. Jeremiah speaks to us now; he is not predicting an event that occurred over 2000 years ago. And today we can therefore hear Jeremiah’s words addressed to us; *“The days are surely coming, says the LORD, when I will fulfil the promise I made to the house of Israel and the house of Judah.”*

Again, this is not a prediction for us to watch unfold; it is a truth/promise for us to live into reality. The Advent quest, and the Advent question is can we, each and together, live into reality our becoming; *“a righteous Branch to.... execute justice and righteousness in the land.”* We could of course, go shopping and leave the promise of tomorrow in the hands of Julia Gillard and Tony Abbott. However, Jeremiah sees beyond such a vision of un-fulfilment, and sees a divine promise that is within us. The prophet’s certainty is fulfilled

when we awake to its promise, and live that promise into reality. And the Christmas Nativity is a narrative icon of that very process.

The prophetic worldview is invariably voiced as that of a God who always sees us as we are, and forever holds the promise, potential and possibility before us of who we can more fully become. When we get to Christmas we will hear again the telling of another prophetic reality, the nativity tells of our truest birth, the incarnation that we claim Sunday by Sunday, we are the Body of Christ. The Old Testament prophets are also inviting us into that same Divine truth.

“The days are surely coming, says the LORD, when I will fulfil the promise I made to the house of Israel and the house of Judah.”

Of course *“the days are coming”*; each and every moment is always a new beginning, and each moment provides us with an infinite number of possible ways to respond to that moment. What we are asked to more closely contemplate in Advent is, what will I do with these each and every moments of possibility? And of course we are all different; however, if we hold true to our claim of being of *“one body”*, then we can contemplate the unfolding of tomorrow as a community reality and we have a part to play rather than the whole responsibility of its realisation.

The gospel provides us with a similar orientation for Advent, again it can be easily written off as pointing to another time as the first four verses use apocalyptic language which is so often misunderstood as pointing to the *“end times”*. If we read the same with a knowing that every moment is both the end of time and the beginning of time, we have a gospel that is very much contextualised for us in the now of Advent. The darkness, despair and chaos of the first four verses, also contain Jeremiah’s prophetic promise; *“Then they will see ‘the Son of Man coming in a cloud’ with power and great glory.”*

When the world is found to fill us with *“fear and foreboding”*, and when we are confronted with the *“end times”*, when our world no longer offers life, we are offered and invited to see again the truth that is the truth we are called to make real: *“So also, when you see these things taking place, you know that the kingdom of God is near.”* The Christmas narrative that we are approaching will further underline how very near the kingdom of God is.

Verses 32 and 33 again emphasise the immediacy, the now that Jesus is speaking of:
“32 Truly I tell you, this generation will not pass away until all things have taken place. 33 Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.”

Our Advent invitation is to realise life’s fullest calling in the moment; it is not a future event, it is an ever-present possibility. The world will change around us - *“Heaven and earth will pass away”* - but the truth, our eternal reality, *“will not pass away.”*

And we are then given advice for our engagement with Advent:

34 “Be on guard so that your hearts are not weighed down with dissipation and drunkenness and the worries of this life....

36 Be alert at all times, praying that you may have the strength to escape all these things that will take place, and to stand before the Son of Man.”

Last Sunday we brought to an end the old church year; this Sunday we come to the beginning of a new church year – these liturgical movements echo the prophetic certainty of Jeremiah, and also the gospel narrative. The movement mirrors the Alpha and Omega, and the Dying and Rising that is revealed in the life of Christ. They also seek to engage us in the reality of life and remind us of the possibility of our becoming.

Three quotes to finish off:

Madonna - *"No matter who **you are**, no matter what **you did**, no matter where **you've come from**, **you can always change, become a better version of yourself.**"*

Lady Gaga sings of the place of Advent: *"I 'm on the edge of glory And I'm hanging on a moment of truth"*

Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Prayer*

"What you are is God's gift to you, what you become is your gift to God."

The Lord be with you

Peter Humphris