

St Marc, Grenoble Sunday 28th November 2021

Jeremiah 33: 14 - 16

Psalm 25: 1 - 9

Luke 21: 25 - 36

'Lift up your heads'

Good Morning! Welcome to those of you in Church, and joining us on Zoom.

Happy New Year! (Why on earth did the Pastor say that??)

You may realise, in the Church Calendar, today is Advent Sunday, which, for Anglicans at least, is the start of the New Church Year.

Many people think that the start of the year is at Christmas, but - correctly we start with the preparation for the coming of the Lord Jesus.

Advent is the season of preparation, of preparation for the birth of Jesus, at Christmas time.

However, as we read in our Gospel this morning, Jesus Himself warned us to be ready for far more. Advent, which means 'coming', is a season of preparation, getting ready for what is to come.

On one level, we're preparing to celebrate the Joy of Christmas, the wonder of our Saviour being born, in a manger, a feeding trough, something over two thousand years ago – to celebrate 'God with Us' the birth of God's Son, in human form. Wonderful, exciting but almost incomprehensible –

Why would God do that? Send His only Son to earth, to be born into poverty, homelessness and, almost immediate persecution, to live a blameless life and to be betrayed by one of His friends and handed over by His own people, to be crucified – a most humiliating and painful death, at the hands of foreign soldiers ... WHY? Would God do that?

Well, the answer is simple: because He loves us, He loves every one of us, however disobedient, however broken; He loves us and He wants to save us from a fate worse than death, He wants to save us from isolation from Him.

It was even prophesied by the prophet Jeremiah - who was first called to prophesy in 626BC, that is at least 600 years before Jesus' ministry on earth - as we heard in our first reading this morning: 'In those days and at that time, I shall grow for David a faithful branch, and He will implement authority and faithfulness in the country ... and this is what it will be called 'Yahweh Is Our Faithfulness'.'

So, Yahweh - our Father God - sent His Son - the one person He could

depend on, to die on the cross, to pay the price for our redemption from our sins, and then to rise again to conquer the power of death, once and for all.

Remarkable, astounding and wonderful are all sentiments that spring to mind; and it all began at the first Christmas. It's so remarkable we continue to celebrate it today, over 2,000 years later.

But, as I hinted earlier, Jesus urges us to be prepared for something very different to the arrival of a baby in a manger, in a cattle shed; our Gospel reading v.27 warns 'Then they will see the Son of Man coming on a cloud - with power and great majesty ... then Stand up and Lift up your Heads, because the time has come for you to be redeemed!'

Yes! Stand firm, stand tall and be prepared, be ready - THIS is what you've been waiting and hoping for all these years.

Jesus also told a graphic parable to help us understand; He said – when you see the fig tree, and the other trees, putting out new shoots and then leaves (fig trees apparently shoot early, but are late in opening their leaves), then you know summer is on the way.

Similarly, when you see signs of change in the heavens and on earth, then you'll know redemption is coming! But, maybe not yet ... Be prepared!!

We're told to stay alert – not to be distracted by any materialistic party-time lifestyle, or we may end up falling into the trap of complacency: sadly, I'm afraid far too many people already have.

v.34 says: 'so watch out for yourselves, that your hearts may not grow heavy with dissipation and drunkenness and the cares of this life.'

And, more than that, we have a clear warning; for the time when we will all be called to give account of ourselves and our actions, on the last day; or, as some prefer to say, at the end of the world.

Jesus told his disciples He will return to bring redemption. He told them to look out for certain warning signs, which will herald, or announce, His arrival.

He also made it clear that there'll be no precise way of telling when it will be; but, we must 'Be Prepared' for His arrival. (Who apart from Ian is, or has been in the Scouts? - I know Richard Sheppard has, and I was involved in Scouting for many years!) The motto of the Scout movement is just that: 'Be Prepared'!!

When Jesus returns, we will all be expected to give account of ourselves and our actions – judgement day will be here - not for the few, but for everyone!

I often wonder if events like massive storms, hurricanes, tsunamis, typhoons, earthquakes and global warming may be just the kind of sign Jesus told us to watch out for? They may be or they may not! We won't know until it happens

But, the one question we all need to ask ourselves now - and ask ourselves continually, is ... 'If Jesus returns today – am I ready to meet him???'

We will 'stand before the Lord Jesus', we will be tried and, inevitably, we will all be found to have fallen short.

But, take heart, because we've also been promised that, if we believe and trust in Jesus, He will ensure our redemption; He will lead us to take our place, worshipping God, face to face, for eternity.

What a wonderful prospect, what an amazing promise; and, what's more, the hard work has already been done for us, by Jesus.

What we have to do, in the words of the old hymn, is to be ready, be prepared and 'Trust and Obey'.

Today is the beginning of Advent, the time of preparation before Christmas and for everything that Christmas leads to.

While we still have the opportunity, let's 'Be Prepared';

Be ready, get sorted with Jesus; and learn to walk in His way, together with Him, along the path of the rest of our life.

And be ready – in His company, to meet our Father God, face to face on the last day, confident of our redemption! **Amen** ...

Let us thank God for that!

Praise the Lord - Alleluia!