

## Sermon for Advent Sunday 2020.

Isaiah 62:10-12. Romans 13:8-14. Psalm 96:9-13.  
Matthew 21:1-13.

**The Collect:** Almighty God, give us grace that we may cast away the works of darkness, and put upon us the armour of light, now in the time of this mortal life, in which thy Son Jesus Christ came to visit us in great humility; that in the last day, when he shall come again in his glorious Majesty, to judge both the living and the dead, we may rise to the life immortal; through him who lives and reigns with thee and the Holy Spirit, now and ever. Amen.

Come, Lord in might and deliver us from the sins which threaten to enslave us, that under thy protection we may stand fast in the freedom of thy gospel; who lives and reigns with the Father, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, God for ever and ever. Amen.

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

Advent Sunday: the beginning of an event, an invention being made, the arrival of a person, the start of the ecclesiastical year? Various definitions of the word Advent can be found, all of which alert us to a change in circumstances. Something is imminent that will break the routine. The problem is, that we are so used to routine, to normality, that we don't notice when one thing changes into another: just as we are not aware of seconds and minutes passing imperceptibly from one to the next. Except, as Samuel Johnson said: 'Depend upon it, sir, when a man knows he is to be hanged in a fortnight, it concentrates his mind wonderfully.'

Advent Sunday would be celebrated differently if we had prior knowledge that it was going to be the last. Indeed, for all of us, and for thousands of other people, it could be the last Advent Sunday. We might find that the metaphorical knock on the door is not going to be a double-glazing salesman, but the sobering realisation of our own time-limited life in the body. I have no doubt that the older we get, the more aware we can be of the fact that life is fragile. Yet, it is also a gift. We don't bestow the gift on ourselves, and with some exceptions such as suicide, we don't intend to throw the gift away. As the hymn 'O God our help in ages past' reads: Time, like an ever-rolling stream, bears all its sons away; they fly forgotten, as a dream dies at the opening day.

What would our response be to the arrival (the advent) of the person of Jesus Christ in our own town, or at our own door? In Scotland it's said that you can tell the difference between somebody from Glasgow and from Edinburgh thus: Someone from Glasgow greets a visitor with the invitation 'Come in and have some tea.' Whereas somebody from Edinburgh says 'Come in, you'll have had your tea.' Would our response to Jesus' arrival be more Glasgow than Edinburgh? Actually, as

you know, it will be more serious than displaying basic courtesy. We must try our best to be ready for his arrival, or for the arrival of our soul at the judgement seat; if He has not pre-empted that by coming in the clouds to reclaim the earth. Revelation 1:7 tells us: Behold, he cometh with clouds; and every eye shall see him, and they also which pierced him: and all kindreds of the earth shall wail because of him.

St Paul in Romans 13:12 says: 'Let us then cast off the works of darkness and put on the armour of light.' Thus, the wailing of all kindreds of the earth, according to St John, and St Paul, will be that of anguish. It will reveal that the heart of man has focussed on self-gratification rather than on thankfulness for redemption from sin and self-centredness that faith in Christ offered. In short, people who elevate themselves to high status of their own invention will recognise their mistake; and it will be a crushing blow to their self-esteem.

Our society claims it is enlightened, and that only gullible people believe in a supernatural being. The spirit of the age tells people that they have the right to 'follow their dream' and that translates as: whatever you fancy being or doing, that's a reality worth chasing. This type of person has been called 'The Psychological Self' see Carl Trueman's essay <https://www.thepublicdiscourse.com/2020/11/72156/> Trueman writes: 'In earlier ages, personal meaning was something discovered by individuals through being educated in how to locate themselves within established external structures such as family, church, or nation. With the psychological turn, however, these things come to be seen as potential hindrances to personal authenticity.' In the past people assumed they were fulfilled by even a mundane job because it enabled them to provide food and clothing for their family. Now, expectation is that fulfilment is achieved by doing whatever makes you feel good personally. The outcome of this is that reverence for God because of His intrinsic authority is dispensed with.

Has the world been enriched by this attitude of dream fulfilment? Indeed, who has created these dreams? Psalm 96 tells us that the whole earth should stand in awe of the Lord, and that when they do they rejoice and are glad, they are joyful, both the peoples and the environment. When people claim to be superior to the wisdom of God as we have it in the Bible, the fruits of their self-deceit are more individualistic than communal. Examples of this can be seen in the atomisation of society and the over-exploitation of natural resources.

So, this Advent, we should make an effort to put our houses in order. The King is coming to visit His creation, and to call us all to account for the state in which He finds it. St Paul tells us that we do this by fulfilling the commandments, doing no wrong to our neighbour, and, above all, by putting on the Lord Jesus Christ, making no provision for self-gratification of the flesh. In other words, concentrate on Him, not on self.

In the name of God, Father, Son and Holy Ghost, Amen.