

SERMON NOTES: Sunday 1<sup>st</sup> December 2024  
Text: Jeremiah 33:14-16; Luke 21:25-36  
Advent 1

*Jeremiah...*

Our readings for this first Sunday of Advent  
open with an announcement,  
a declaration: '*a day is coming*'.

Jeremiah, a giant among prophets..  
gives to us,  
across a vast stretch of time,  
a ancient glimpse into the future;  
a prophecy of things to come;  
a promise that God will fulfil;  
a hope inspired through a new  
and enduring 'branch' of the legendary King David.

Once again, Jeremiah assures us,  
that justice, righteousness, salvation,  
and security will eventually reign.

And these developments  
are not be credited to human action,  
but to God's action: 'The LORD is our Righteousness'.

Of course,  
reading this through our Gospel-centred view,  
we see here the action of God in the person of Jesus:

we can see how close Jeremiah's language  
is to Jesus' himself.

In the life, ministry and actions of Jesus  
we see and hear Jeremiah's hope fulfilled.  
and as before we give the credit of this,  
not to ourselves,  
but to the initiative and action of God  
in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus.

Jeremiah's message of hope to his exiled readers  
is now infused with the story of Jesus.

*Gospel...*

Few passages raise as many questions as today's Gospel reading.  
How literal is all this to be taken?  
What happens if it is taken in a more symbolic way?

What are we to do with the words 'this generation'  
in a context that until then  
looks like it is referring to times that remain  
– thousands of years later – are still unfulfilled?

Perhaps to take Jesus' words literally  
may not be the only way –  
or even the best way –  
to take him seriously about what he is saying.

We have no historical record  
of the events such as Jesus' describes,  
happening within a generation of Jesus' delivering  
this strange and seemingly violent picture.

It would be reasonable to expect some evidence  
if they had occurred....

*....(a man flying on clouds  
and the shaking of the heavens would certainly be news-worthy!).*

The absence of any evidence  
often causes people  
who want a literal interpretation  
to look to events  
as if they are yet to occur, namely, end times.

If we do take a more symbolic approach,  
we might be able to conclude that Jesus  
is referring to a coming time of great upheaval  
*within the lifetime of his hearers.*

And for that there is historical evidence...

History tells us of a violent upheaval for Israel  
within a generation of Jesus.

The sacking of Jerusalem in 70AD, by the Romans,  
following a rebellion,  
was a time when all that was taken for granted  
about the world had to be reconsidered.

For all who lived through that time,  
it was a time of great upheaval,  
and words such as Jesus uses,  
would have had powerful resonance  
words such as: 'distress', 'fear', and 'foreboding'.

So perhaps this event is what Jesus has in mind.

***Jesus Core Message....***

But you know,  
any discussion or debates  
(as important as they may be)  
are not I think Jesus' core message here.

Jesus is primarily making an urgent call...  
...a call to watch expectantly  
– even in the darkest of times –  
for the action of God.

So he says....  
*Now when these things begin to take place,  
stand up ----- and raise your heads,  
because your redemption is drawing near.'*

You might think he would say the opposite..  
in times of distress, and foreboding,  
when fear and hopelessness for many seem to be the norm...  
find a place to hide until it all passes over.

That's our instinct!

But he says the opposite..  
*"stand up ----- and raise your heads..."*

God's kingdom has come in the person of Jesus  
and it isn't finished...  
it is yet to come in all its fullness.  
It is both now and not yet reality.

And our stance in this time: is to  
*"stand up ----- and raise your heads..."*

### ***Advent...***

Advent celebrates these two comings,  
preparing to celebrate the one who has come,  
and looking with hope for when he returns.

Knowing this, we are asked to wait and watch.

We're asked to look for any sign of God's activity  
in the same way a farmer waits, watches,  
and works for the first shoots  
and its promise of a harvest.

We do this because God,  
in the person of Jesus,  
has instilled, and is instilling, in us this hope...  
a hope that is not of our making and  
thankfully does not rely on us.

It is God's gift and promise.

Interestingly Jesus goes on to warn of the possibility  
that his words might be forgotten.

Strange isn't it.

But then, perhaps he knows us  
better than we know ourselves.

He knows  
that we can often be forewarned and still do nothing;  
we can be informed and still remain unprepared;  
we can be knowledgeable and still be blissfully unaware.

And so Jesus calls us to be vigilant, alert,  
vigilant and alert with ourselves,  
as much as waiting for the one who returns,

and prayerful,  
prayerfully seeking God's strength in every circumstance.

Jesus hopes here for a people  
who will be faithful even through conflict and defeat;  
a people who can continue to stand the very end.

What a relevant call for each and every generation.  
What a relevant call to the church today, and even us here.

After all,  
none of us know the timing  
of the return of Jesus.

Whether we live on the cusp of Jesus' return  
or remain closer to the events of the gospels,  
is not for us to say.

What we do know,  
is that we are between the first  
and the second comings of the Christ.  
And with no more detail than this,  
we watch and wait in hope-filled faith.

*Now when these things begin to take place,  
stand up ----- and raise your heads,  
because your redemption is drawing near.'*

**PRAYER...**

*God of hope, who brought love into this world,  
be the love that dwells between us.  
God of hope, who brought peace into this world,  
be the peace that dwells between us.  
God of hope, who brought joy into this world,  
be the joy that dwells between us.  
God of hope, the rock we stand upon,  
be the centre, the focus of our lives  
always, and particularly this Advent time. Amen.*