

## **Advent Sunday 2021. Revd David Treharne**

Almighty God, give us grace to cast away the works of darkness and to put on the armour of light, now in the time of this mortal life, in which your Son Jesus Christ came to us in great humility; that on the last day, when he shall come again in his glorious majesty to judge the living and the dead, we may rise to the life immortal; through him who is alive and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever.

*(or)*

Almighty God, as your kingdom dawns, turn us from the darkness of sin to the light of holiness, that we may be ready to meet you in our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ.

### **Post Communion**

O Lord our God, make us watchful and keep us faithful as we await the coming of your Son our Lord; that, when he shall appear, he may not find us sleeping in sin but active in his service and joyful in his praise; through Jesus Christ our Lord.

### **Jeremiah 33:14-16**

<sup>14</sup>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. <sup>15</sup>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. <sup>16</sup>In those days Judah will be saved and Jerusalem will live in safety. And this is the name by which it will be called: 'The Lord is our righteousness.'

### **Luke 21:25-36**

#### **The Coming of the Son of Man**

<sup>25</sup>'There will be signs in the sun, the moon, and the stars, and on the earth distress among nations confused by the roaring of the sea and the waves. <sup>26</sup>People will faint from fear and foreboding of what is coming upon the world, for the powers of the heavens will be shaken. <sup>27</sup>Then they will see "the Son of Man coming in a cloud" with power and great glory. <sup>28</sup>Now when these things begin to take place, stand up and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near.'

#### **The Lesson of the Fig Tree**

<sup>29</sup>Then he told them a parable: 'Look at the fig tree and all the trees; <sup>30</sup>as soon as they sprout leaves you can see for yourselves and know that summer is already near. <sup>31</sup>So also, when you see these things taking place, you know that the kingdom of God is near. <sup>32</sup>Truly I tell you, this generation will not pass away until all things have taken place.

<sup>33</sup>Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.

#### **Exhortation to Watch**

<sup>34</sup>'Be on guard so that your hearts are not weighed down with dissipation and drunkenness and the worries of this life, and that day does not catch you unexpectedly, <sup>35</sup>like a trap. For it will come upon all who live on the face of the whole earth. <sup>36</sup>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.'

## **Sermon. Christians stand in the dark with their faces lit by the coming dawn!**

**"Christians stand in the dark with their faces lit by the coming dawn."**

I can't remember where this line came from and who said, but I don't care... it's a brilliant metaphor!

**"Christians stand in the dark with their faces lit by the coming dawn."**

As we begin Advent we are confronted with the uncomfortable reality of darkness in our world and in our own lives and hearts. But the beautiful, wonderful message of Advent is that the reality of darkness is not the whole story.

As the lit candle each week will remind us,  
Christ is the HOPE in the midst of the darkness of despair  
He is PEACE in the midst of conflict and unrest  
He is JOY in the midst of misery, sadness, trial and tribulation  
He is LOVE in the midst of indifference and hatred  
Christ is our light and our salvation!. Jesus is the LIGHT of the world!

Christians stand in the midst of despair, conflict unrest, sadness, trial, indifference and hatred... with their faces lit by the coming Christ who is hope, peace, joy, love and light.

### **Luke's Gospel**

Luke's Gospel hits some of these nails on the head with Jesus' words about a world in uproar. I think that these words are as much about the happenings of our interior life, and a loss of hope, as it is about events in the natural world.

Throughout Scripture the "roaring of sea and waves" (Luke 21:25) is a symbol with some force, of the world in chaos – nation against nation and people against people – but also the chaos that can be experienced within – fear and foreboding within at what is happening in the world or what will happen... so much so that it causes such distress as to cause fainting at the prospect of despair, conflict unrest, sadness, trial, indifference and hatred.

Jesus' words states that hearts can become weighed down and faith can start to dissipate (Luke 21:34)... and may make people give up or perhaps turn to drink (Luke 21:34). Those first readers of the Gospel thought Christ was returning very soon but it hadn't happened, and in the midst of persecution and trial they were struggling, and tempted to give up their faith and hope in Christ. We too can lose hope and contemplate chucking our faith as we face any kind of darkness.

So what shall we do? Dwelling on this Gospel passage there is a little nugget of pure gold that spoke to me and I think it is a message for us all... and it links with that phrase...  
"Christians stand in the dark with their faces lit by the coming dawn."

In verse 28... *"when these things begin to take place"*  
When there is distress among the nations, roaring of the seas and chaos and fear and foreboding and darkness... the Scripture goes on to say...

***"stand up and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near."***

There is a sense of choice and challenge here from Jesus for us to stand and raise our heads to the Lord, and look to God afresh.

Psalm 121 comes to mind. *“I lift up my eyes to the hills, where does my help come from?”*

It can be very hard indeed to lift up our heads and eyes, but let us dare to lift up our heads spiritually, emotionally, psychologically and physically... for the Scripture promises a Redeemer... a light to shine in the darkness.

If our heads are bowed down in despair the dawning sun cannot light up our face. We remain in the shadows and darkness.

Hebrews 12:1&2 says *“let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, <sup>2</sup>fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith.”*

It can be really difficult to look to Jesus and the light, and so easy to look at the worries, disappointments and darkness... despair, conflict unrest, sadness, trial, indifference and hatred.

Just take the news. We can be drawn to watching hours of coverage about Covid and become swamped by despair... and bowed down.

It takes something of a decision to focus on Jesus in any darkness and take steps to stop some of the trains of thoughts and replace them with something of what is good and lovely and wholesome and allow the light to shine on us.

And God will help us with this, especially if we feel we cannot lift our heads. In Psalm 3:3, David says to God, “You are the lifter up of my head.” In other words, “God, you deliver me from being consumed by the troubles that afflict me and cause me to despair. You lift my head above the water so that I can breathe and will not drown. You lift my head from the darkness to the light... and so I look to you.”

As Advent begins let us look to Christ again.

Let us put our hope in him.

ST Paul describes Jesus Christ as “our hope” (1 Timothy 1:1) and “the blessed hope” (Titus 2:13). He not only comes to bring hope. He IS our hope.

Christ is our hope of the future — he will come again... and we will be redeemed, and that there will be no more pain, no more tears, no more death.

Christ is our hope of the past — in his first coming sin and death did not have the final word, that our failures are not greater than God’s power to transform, and that through Jesus’ birth, life death and resurrection the way to God and eternal life was opened up to us.

BUT Christ is ALSO our hope of the present — that we are not alone here and now, we are loved and have a hope and a purpose, and that he shines his light into our lives and transforms us now. St. Bernard (11<sup>th</sup> Century) talks of the coming of Christ in and to our

own soul now; when we have drifted into the shadows, when we are fainting from fear and foreboding, when we are in distress and bowed down. He comes – the light into the dark of our hearts.

We need hope in darkness and Pandemics! Hope keeps us going and helps us through pressures, challenges, losses and demands. Hope helps us to persevere and stand sometimes through the most unimaginable circumstances.

Christ Jesus is our hope and the hope of the nations. Rather than faint and fear amidst the turmoil of life and bow our heads in shame, guilt and hopeless despair we are urged to look up and see the coming Christ. Raise your head and see who & what's coming. Salvation! Redemption! A peace! A rest! A hope and a future!

Christians stand in the dark with their faces lit by the coming dawn.

*"though the earth give way and the mountains fall into the heart of the sea... we will not fear."* Psalm 46:2

*"Though the mountains be shaken and the hills be removed, yet my unfailing love for you will not be shaken nor my covenant of peace be removed," says the LORD, who has compassion on you.*" Isaiah 54:10

*"Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I will fear no evil, for you are with me."* Psalm 23:4

*"But this I call to mind and therefore I have hope. The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases. His mercies never come to an end."* Lamentations 3:21+22

If we can lift our heads and hearts and be lit up... we will also bring light and hope to others.