

Sermon by Rev David Thiem

Advent 1 – 9am Wesley – 27th November 2016

Theme: “Be ready, be prepared but also live a life for Christ”

Text: “Therefore keep watch, because you do not know on what day your Lord will come.”

Matthew: 24:42

“So let us put aside the deeds of darkness and put on the armour of light.”

Romans 13:12b

Entering into Matthew’s Gospel

This Sunday the lectionary begins a yearlong reading through Matthew’s Gospel. On this first Sunday of Advent we encounter a theme that runs throughout Matthew but is not much in vogue with Australian Christians: divine judgement!! Matthew 24: 36-44 speaks of the humdrum routine of our lives. As in the days of Noah, ‘people were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage.’ Vs 38. Just like the ancients, our time is consumed with the repetitious, sometimes boring daily round of activity, which we call everyday life. And then, without warning and out of nowhere, like the surprise entry of a thief, the daily routine of ordinary life is thrown into crisis. Jesus here warns not of crisis that intrudes into our lives like death, sickness, losing a job, or having conflict with others. Rather the crisis that intrudes is, like the crisis in the days of Noah, a crisis that occurs because of the advent of God. The Human One, the Son of Man arrives, and daily life is totally disrupted.

Perhaps it’s only natural for human beings to crave stability. We enjoy the predictability of routine and pray that our orderly passage of time will not be disrupted. Therefore we do what we can to stabilise our time. We take precautions, take out insurance against life’s vicissitudes and attempt to control our lives and keep things together. If you are younger you take out life insurance. If you are older, like me, you are bombarded to take out funeral insurance so as not to be a financial burden on your kids – well that’s the advertising at least!!

The reality is, human life is inherently unstable. We may achieve a modicum of personal financial and bodily security, but then this one factor of humanity threatens – death. Death mocks all of our vain attempts to stabilize our time, our lives.

However, in the time of Noah, the crisis was brought about by God. The routine of life was changed, overturned by God’s unexpected intrusion.

Jesus warns of a similarly disruptive entrance by God into our own time. We should live as those who expect God to show up, to intrude, to be present to us in ways we find disruptive and dislocating. Of course, such talk is biblical apocalyptic.

Apocalypse simply means ‘revelation’ or ‘uncovering’ and isn’t simply a claim about the future, it’s also a claim about the present. The present age is not necessarily stable and fixed. Our lives are not fixed by simply continuing to live as we are. God is at work, seeking God’s purposes and just maybe God is not done with us yet.

I had my future mapped out for myself. I’d be ministering here at Wesley until I was 65 and a half and then I’d retire – a great plan.

However, it appears God has other requirements of me and hence, from left field so to speak, my life is thrown into turmoil and I’m back into the Navy next year.

Definitely not something I would have envisaged 12 months ago. God has this knack of throwing curve balls at us from time to time as we are open to the leading of God’s Holy Spirit. As we enter Advent and Matthew’s gospel for the next year, allow God to enter your life – you never know where it may lead you.

Romans 13:11-14

Our Romans reading also picks up this image of a new life in Christ.

It is the imagery of waking from a sleep and beginning a new day in the light of Christ. The imagery of darkness being put to one side and the armour of light being our guide, is quite dramatic.

It is like last Sunday's testimony from Tolstoy that as he accepted Christ, he enjoyed the things of light rather than his past which had been of darkness. Such was the transformation that he had come into the pleasure of the light of Christ. The imagery here is also that the light of Christ is like armour against the darkness of aspects of the world. Christ is our protector and encourager, even when we are not sure of things in the world.

In these few verses from Romans there are several practical things said: -
live honourably - ***'put on the Lord Jesus Christ'***.

In other words, live your life fully immersed in Christ and the dark things in your life will be put aside as you follow Christ. Some good advice to the church in Rome by Paul. Rome was the capital of the empire and there was much drunkenness and debauchery along with much political quarrelling and jealousy – sounds like a place quite near to us right now, doesn't it!! Just maybe the scripture is for us and our community of Canberra so long after this was written.

Reflection

Let me share another testimony with you today. However this one goes a long way in time. As an adult looking back on his life, St Augustine wrote about his conversion to Christ when he was a young adult. St Augustine had lived a fairly loose life, had a mistress and fathered a child out of marriage. One day he heard a child singing something about 'pick up and read'. He had a copy of some of St Paul's letters beside him, which he picked up and his eyes fell upon today's epistle, specifically Romans 13:13-14:

"Let us live honourably and appropriately ...not partying and getting drunk, not in sleeping around and obscene behaviour...Instead, dress yourself with the Lord Jesus Christ."

He put a marker at that text, and shortly thereafter he and his teenage son were baptized. It was for him as if, through reading Scripture, God entered his life, his old life had ended and a new life had begun.

Here as we begin the season of Advent, preparing for the story of the birth of a Saviour, scripture speaks to us at the outset and reminds us, not to worry about the when of the coming of our Lord, but rather to be prepared in our own life to receive the presence of Christ and the upset that may bring to us and those around us.

This is the word of the Lord for us today as we enter the Advent season – come Lord Jesus come.

Prayer

Merciful God, down through the ages you sent your messengers, the prophets, to preach repentance, to urge us to amend our lives and to show us the way to salvation. During these days of Advent, enable us to take heed and be ready for your advent. Give us grace to heed the warnings and the call of scripture today to get our lives in order now as we do not know the hour of your coming again and we need to be prepared, but not worried. We pray this through our Lord and Saviour, Jesus the Christ, your promised One, O God. Amen.