

## **SERMON – 11 DECEMBER 2016**

### **PRAYER IN ADVENT – WAITING ON THE LORD (Rev Dr Brenda Robson)**

#### **READINGS: Lamentations 3: 17–26; Luke 22: 39-46**

Advent is a time of waiting – word related to “coming” – waiting for the coming of Jesus

Traditionally advent is the time of waiting for the birth of Jesus, the nativity.

Ken reminded us last week that we also wait for the second coming – and so we live in constant “advent” – we are always waiting or we should be aware that we are always waiting. Christianity is about waiting.

We do not know the day or hour – and so we should be watchful and waiting 24/7. 365 days of the year, not just in December.

How are we waiting?

Dictionary definition - To wait - to remain inactive or in a state of repose until something expected happens

Well, we might do a lot of things in December but remaining inactive and in a state of repose probably do not feature much!

Presents to buy and wrap, food to buy and prepare, cards to write and post, a Christmas tree to haul out of the loft or haul home from the garden centre, carol concerts, Christmas dinners, work parties and nights out.

When do we fit Jesus into our schedule?

How often do we stop, take time out to be with Jesus?

How often do we stop and then turn our attention to so many distractions around us – look at the cartoon on the front of the order of service. It is so true! Jesus is with us all the time and most of the time we ignore him. We might read our bibles and go to church and spend lots of time with the sheep without ever hearing Jesus speak because we don't listen, we don't keep quiet for long enough.

A parent or teacher might say “Sit still and pay attention!” but who says that to us now as adults?

Look around on you on the bus or tram or train – the majority of people will be on their mobile phones, same in a café or restaurant

Its like people can't bear to be still and quiet and reflective and thoughtful, we need constant stimulation and distraction. Boredom sets in after two minutes silence.

I know from home visits throughout my working life that the television is on constantly in many houses – and the number of times I had to ask for the TV to be at least turned down so that I could have a conversation! I used to speak softly so that the person couldn't hear me and had to turn the TV down.

And the busyness and activity starts from the moment we waken up in the morning.

The prophet Jeremiah in Lamentations 3 speaks of the joys of morning – the Lord's great love and compassion never fail, they are new every morning. The Lord is waiting for us to waken up so that he can pour his love and attention on us and spend time with us.

Jeremiah proclaims "Great is your faithfulness this morning Lord and I thank you for all the wonderful things you are going to do today, I praise you that you will be with me all day, show me what you want me to do, what you want me to say, where you want me to go, today is a new adventure full of opportunity."

And Jeremiah has this great start to the day because he seeks the Lord and he waits quietly for him. He doesn't rush into the day until he has met with the Lord.

This is the day that the Lord has made, I will rejoice and be glad in it.

Is that how your day begins? I confess that it is not how my day has begun in recent times.

The alarm rings, its still pitch dark, you hit the snooze button, it rings again, you hit the snooze button again, and again. And then you leap out of bed already behind time. You rush around in a frenzy, can't find things, you're grumpy with your husband or wife, you yell at the kids and then feel bad, where did you put the car keys? Oh God, it's minus three and the car is all iced up! You enter the rush hour traffic and everyone is driving badly except you. You are frantically trying to devise the excuse, the lie you'll tell to explain your lateness. And you arrive at your destination frustrated and frazzled and exhausted. What a start to the day.

And the devil will laugh all the way because you have not taken time to be with the Lord. Time with God, especially in the morning, is so important and so valuable that the devil will work hard to prevent you from having the quiet time that leads to a closer walk with God all day.

Most of us could get up 20 or 30 minutes earlier than usual to make time for God. People say "But I'm not a morning person!" Well, get over it, become a morning person! You probably go to bed too late!

My new phone has an evening alarm. I set the time I want to get up in the morning and late evening, about 11, the alarm rings and the message says "If you want 8 hours sleep you need to go to bed now!"

Now I can excuse parents of babies and young children from rising early – you need all the sleep you can get! But most of us could get out of bed earlier than we do if we were disciplined about it.

If we can't find some quiet time to be with the Lord then we are really not waiting on him at all.

Joyce Meyer, the American evangelist, made an interesting point recently. She said that we take great care of our physical appearance when we are going out. We shower and do our hair, men shave and apply the smelly stuff, women apply make up, choose our outfit, make sure it is clean and ironed, everything matching. A last look in the mirror and we're ready to face the world.

But Joyce says we go out spiritually naked. We neglect our spiritual well being, we don't put on the armour of God as described in

Ephesians 6:10-18:

**10** Be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. **11** Put on the full armour of God, so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes. **12** For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.

*How can we go out to wage spiritual battles without our armour, spiritually naked?*

**13** Therefore put on the full armour of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand. **14** Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled round your waist,

*you carry with you the promises of God, the biblical truths, he gives you the words to say in every situation, words of wisdom,*

Have the breastplate of righteousness in place

*be right with God, ask God through his holy spirit to help you lead more holy lives, to love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your mind and with all your soul, after all the breastplate protects the heart*

**15** and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace

*ask God to be with you wherever your feet take you, wherever you walk, that you might be a peacemaker and take the gospel of peace into a broken world*

**16** In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one.

*our faith is our only protection against the devil, why would we want to go out*

*without the shield of faith firmly in place*

**17** Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.

**18** And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests.

We need to take as much care over our spiritual preparations for the day as we do over our physical preparations. Our day should start with prayer.

Paul wrote to the Philippians "I can do everything through him who gives me strength (4:13)

Paul said to the Romans that they should clothe themselves with the Lord Jesus Christ (13:14)

Because the sad thing, what we are missing, is that fact that Jesus is waiting on us! As I said at the beginning, he is waiting for us to awake from sleep and to spend time with him.

I included the short reading from Luke about Jesus going to the Garden of Gethsemane with Peter, James and John on the night of his arrest. It's the third time in this season of Advent that I've been taken to Easter verses rather than Christmas verses. Jesus wants his disciples to wait with him and to pray. But they fall asleep. In Mark's gospel, Jesus actually comes to them three times and they have fallen asleep three times. There is such sadness and sorrow in his words to them, could you not stay awake with me even one hour, the spirit is willing but the body is weak.

I vaguely remembered reading "a letter from Jesus" on this theme a long time and Dora helped me find it the other day. Jesus' letter to us says -

***How are you? I just had to send you this letter to tell you how much I love you and care about you. I saw you yesterday as you were walking with your friends. I waited all day, hoping you would walk and talk with me also. As evening drew near, I gave you a sunset to close your day and a cool breeze to rest you. Then I waited, but you never came. O yes, it hurt me, but I still love you because I am your friend.***

***I saw you fall asleep last night, and I longed to touch your brow so I spilled moonlight upon your pillow and your face ... Again I waited, wanting to rush down so we could talk. I have so many gifts for you.***

***You awakened late this morning and rushed off for the day. My tears were in the rain. Today you looked so sad, so alone. It makes my heart ache because I understand. My friends let me down and hurt me many times but I love you. I try to tell you in the quiet green grass. I whisper it in the leaves and trees and breathe***

*it in the colours of the flowers. I whisper it to you in the mountain streams and give the birds love songs to sing. I clothe you with warm sunshine and perfume the air. My love for you is deeper than the oceans and bigger than the biggest want or need you could ever have.*

*We will spend eternity together in heaven. I know how hard it is on earth. I really know because I was there and I want to help you. My Father wants to help you, too. He's that way, you know. Just call me, ask me, talk to me. It is your decision ... I have chosen you and because of this I will wait ...*

*Because I love you.*

*Your Friend,*

**JESUS**

It is good to talk to Jesus throughout the day and of course we can pray anywhere, any time. I used to pray a lot in the car driving to work or on a train journey. Prayer can be casual chat, snatches of conversation, requests, intercession. But Jesus also wants us to spend some serious time with him, time set aside just for fellowship with him, no distractions, not making Jesus fit into our busy schedule but taking time out of the schedule for quality you and Jesus time.

It is amazing to think about Susanna the mother of hymn writers John and Charles Wesley who had 19 children and a busy, noisy household. Several times in the day she would sit in a corner of her kitchen and throw her apron over her face and everyone knew to leave her alone for a few minutes because she was praying!

Anne Graham Lotz in her book "The Daniel Prayer" encourages us to find somewhere in our house where we can have a quiet time with the Lord and to prepare that place so that there are no distractions and what we need is to hand. Our bible, daily reading, a notebook and pen, perhaps a candle (and matches) or a picture. The phone, ipad, ipod, etc should be in another room. For me that spot is a chair by my bedroom window, the window with the view. But it could be in your armchair or at the kitchen table.

At first Anne Lotz was unable to get up early enough to do this morning time....and she felt that ten minutes was too long to spend in this place in prayer and reflection – but after some time of discipline and simply doing it, she was excited to get out of the bed with the first ring of the alarm and she had to pull herself away after half an hour.

I have included a poem in the order of service for you take away and ponder, especially the last lines.

## **TIME TO PRAY**

*I got up early one morning  
and rushed right into the day;  
I had so much to accomplish  
that I didn't have time to pray.  
Problems just tumbled about me,  
and heavier came each task.  
"Why doesn't God help me?" I wondered.  
He answered, "You didn't ask."  
I wanted to see joy and beauty,  
but the day toiled on, gray and bleak;  
I wondered why God didn't show me.  
He said, "But you didn't seek."  
I tried to come into God's presence;  
I used all my keys at the lock.  
God gently and lovingly chided,  
"My child, you didn't knock."  
I woke up early this morning  
and paused before entering the day;  
I had so much to accomplish that  
I had to take time to pray.*

*(Author unknown)*

We sang a lovely short song two weeks ago – let us carry these words through the rest of the Advent season and beyond and deepen our prayer journey with the Lord.

To be in your presence, to sit at your feet, where your love surrounds me, and makes me complete. This is my desire, O Lord, this is my desire. To rest in your presence, not rushing away, to cherish each moment, here I would stay.

AMEN

