

SERMON: Sunday – 28 November 2021 – Rev Alistair Cowper

Advent - God is waiting for us

Jeremiah 33:14-16

Luke 21:25-36

Jesus said, there will be signs of what is to come for all to see.

At times, it seems easier to see signs of disaster, but can we see signs of hope?

Amid pandemic, climate crisis, and global terror?

Jesus pointed to signs in creation as signs of the long term hope of a future reimagined and coming to be present with us now.

Until Christ comes. Until the earth is completely transfigured, renewed in the glory of God's Spirit, there will be troubles along the way.

But the truth is that the kingdom of God is coming closer, is being born, with all the blood and pain that new birth includes.

We live in the in between times in a sense. Between the start of the Kingdom and it's consumption, it's fullness, its completion.

Creation began in goodness. Christ came in the fullness of love. The Spirit comes in creative, remaking power, making all things new, beginning with us.

And yet, before it's all complete, there may certainly be pains and troubles, but we are not left without hope.

On the contrary, hope is what keeps us going.

"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."

(Paraphrasing - Salvation and safety are coming, righteousness too. Summed up in the name of this new earth and new heaven - The LORD is our righteousness.

(Jeremiah 33:14-16)

Can you feel hope stirring when you hear the Lord say, a day is coming, when

such things will happen?

When things are put right. When migrants no longer drown in the sea fleeing in the hope of a better life elsewhere. When MP's can hold public surgeries without fear of attack.

When nations will live at peace
When women and men, girls and boys, will feel safe in their own homes
When wives will not fear their husbands
When all children will be loved by their parents
When women and girls can walk safely in our streets
When differences can be settled peacefully
When.
When.

I had the privilege last week to spend a few days on Iona.

It was a pilgrimage by public transport and was a time of healing and refreshing for both body and soul.

Though it takes a long time to get there by public transport, it was undoubtedly an easier journey than the one St Columba made in 563.

George Macleod was right to describe it as a thin place, where the difference between the material and spiritual is tissue paper thin.

I'd taken a few books with me and one of them spoke into the message of Advent.

The book is *God and Empire: Jesus Against Rome, Then and Now*
John Dominic Crossan (2007) says this:

"It is not that we are waiting for God, but that God is waiting for us".

"The Second Coming of Christ is what will happen when we Christians finally accept that the First Coming was the Only Coming and start to cooperate with its divine presence".

Along with other theologians this view of the second coming of Christ is all to do with the the unfolding mystery of the Body of Christ, and it's ongoing creation in the world.

We are unfinished creatures who are in the process of being created.
Our world is being created.
Our church is being created.
Christ is being formed in us in love, through love and by Love.

This is what we actively wait for and this is what has already happened. God coming to be with us, as us, in Jesus of Nazareth, which somehow makes God easier to love, because we can relate to God on a human level.

We have to evolve into this way of thinking and being. And that is why the good news is an ongoing process of grace within.

Be on guard said Jesus. Be alert at all times. Lest you be trapped into thinking otherwise and giving up the ghost.

But Jesus promised that a day would come when people would see the Son of Man coming on or in a cloud. Just as he would ascend away from them in a cloud. Just as the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob would appear to Moses in a cloud, and lead his people in a cloud.

Then they will see him. After the signs in the skies and the roaring of the seas.

Then they will see him. After the shaking of the heavens and the torment on the earth.

Then they will see him. And they will know that God's kingdom is near.

He who said that "this generation will not pass away until all things have taken place" anticipated the coming as a soon to come reality in the lifetime of those who heard him speak.

And yes, they would see the Spirit's greatest work in the resurrection from the dead of the Christ, the Victorious One.

And they would see the Spirit's coming to all who believed.

And they would know that the Son of Man and God's kingdom was a clear and present reality, heaven on earth now, renewing all of creation.

Like the fig tree whose leaves emerge after the death of winter, bursting into resurrected life.

The Second Coming is not the return of Jesus on a white stallion with a sword of violence and destruction in his mouth to strike down the nations (19:15).

The Book of Revelation doesn't help us in our theology. The Great Apocalypse that John of Patmos envisioned has not turned out as he might have imagined it would in his lifetime.

The end of time, whatever that means, and none of us can say with certainty, will not come about with divine violence.

And we have to agree with John, that the new heaven and the new earth, will come about and result in God dwelling with people in a gloriously transfigured, transformed new world.

And this will come about when all people are involved in what John Dominic Cross has called, "God's Great Cosmic Cleanup".

And when that has happened, we will know that the Second Coming of Christ will be complete.

In the words of Charles Wesley:
"Saviour take the power and glory
Claim the kingdom for your own
Oh, come quickly,
oh, come quickly
Alleluia! Come, Lord, come!"

Active waiting calls on us to work with Christ in the coming of the Kingdom. As we wait, empowered by the Spirit, let us live as the transfigured and transformed people we are yet to be. And let's remember too, that God is waiting for us.