

## Sermon for Advent Sunday 2020

If only I had listened on previous Advent Sundays to the message that was being told through the readings and the sermons, I might not have allowed myself to be lured so readily into the exciting prospect of chocolate-filled calendars and the anticipation of Christmas celebrations: the trees, the lights, the colours and the costumes, the shepherds and the angels, the goodwill and the goodies.

If only I had actually bothered to take a moment to identify with Isaiah and his audience lamenting the consequences of their brokenness and the plea for salvation and repair from the divine potter who had first shaped them to be his people.

If only I had heard in Jesus' words the stark warning that things you will not expect are just around the corner; that we should be ever watchful, ever prepared. Then I might have been a bit less damaged by 2020 and all that has been cast before us to disrupt our cosy assumptions that we have got this one sorted. It seems they were wrong: we haven't.

It seems that we have learned the hard way that we depend on much more than smug self-satisfaction and cleverness, even if Google Translate can help to mitigate the consequences of building our own towers on the Babel model of Genesis 11. It seems that there is more to life than short-term economic prosperity and that perhaps in taking for granted the small everyday comforts of family and friendship, or even just walking the streets of my village, I have neglected my soul.

That's a hard thing for a vicar to admit when he is well aware that he has received, at his institution to the office, the care of the all the souls of the parishes where he is to be their priest. If I can't look after my own spiritual life, what chance do I have of helping others in theirs?

As we begin a new Christian year with the hopeful expectation of the Christ Child once again in our hearts and homes, let's not be caught out this time with just the kids' stuff. The significance of That Baby is not only that he represents God's incarnate presence among his broken people. We need to remember that he grows up to give his life for them, too.

"Watch out!" is his message, "none of this is forever," he explains, "and that might be sooner than you think." If you haven't already had reason to question your deepest spiritual values this past year and the parlous state of our physical and mental health as a nation, then maybe you should listen now to what Jesus is saying.

Stop looking at your feet and look up to the heavens, because that's where the answers actually are, and if you missed it the first time round, and every year since, then the good news is that God comes among us as one of us. It's in his hands. And in ours.

So, perhaps this is the year to acknowledge that we are not supposed to be in control; rather to have a working relationship with the One who is, and to help bring about his creative intention for us through sharing in the magic of the Incarnation.

That our ultimate goal should be not so much knowledge or understanding, as simply obedience and acceptance of God's will is the lesson of the very first story of mankind in the Bible, and possibly the last one that we learn in our life's struggle. The length of life is less important than the love shown within it.

And I think that's worth a bit of chocolate for now, as a sweet reminder, and definitely a bit of glitter and tinsel when the time comes. Amen.

Fr. Paul