

Sunday Thought

28th November 2021 First Sunday of Advent

Readings

Jeremiah 33: 14 - 16

Psalm 25: 1 - 10

1 Thessalonians 3: 9 - 13

Luke 21: 25 - 36

Ready?



We are fast entering the Advent season. Many children are beginning to get excited about the generous gentleman who arrives very early on Christmas Day. I had a mind-picture of Santa Claus hitching up his reindeers while Mrs. Claus shouted at him from the kitchen window. *'You should have started earlier! I told you you'd be late!'*

The kindly man in red replied, unruffled. *'You seem to want us to start earlier every year!'* The sleighbells rang out. He knew her reply. It was the same every year. *'Wouldn't it be terrible if we weren't ready!'* Jesus made a similar comment in today's gospel reading, but on a much more serious matter.

Of all the Old Testament prophets I feel closest to Jeremiah. That's because of his likeness to Jesus – his sensitivity and closeness to ordinary people; his sorrow over distorted ideas of religion, the Temple and worship; his longing for all people to know God's love and the nation to be renewed in faith. He also shared with Jesus the eye of the artist and an interest in the natural world. Jeremiah uses hundreds of illustrations from Spring blossom to birds' nests, diamonds, flies, horse-racing In the passage from his writing today he warns God's people to be ready for national disaster and the destruction of Jerusalem after which the whole population would be exiled to Babylon. However, at the same time he gives them God's promise of future restoration and salvation. A king in the royal line of David will come. The nation was to hang on to that promise for six hundred years – till Jesus came! Their inspiration came from Jeremiah's confident prayers. Even in the gloom of personal suffering in physical and mental dungeons he prayed, *'Sovereign Lord – nothing is too difficult for you.'*

In the same vein Paul writes to Christians in Thessalonica to encourage them in faith and love. As the capital city of the Roman province of Macedonia, Thessalonica was a key mission station of the first church. It was important that it should maintain its witness especially as it was receiving persecution from some of the Jews there.

He prays confidently that their love for one another will grow stronger so that they WILL become perfect and holy in God's presence and ready for when Jesus comes again to fulfil his Kingdom promises. They must live ready for him.

It is that confident prayer of faith which will make a church powerful in its mission, forgiving, loving, getting its people ready for Jesus and his reign of love. Waiting for him we find him coming to us in every pastoral contact, in every moment of peace making and caring love for one another. The church waits for him as eagerly as little children waiting for Christmas. If we have been ready for him each day, we shall be ready at his Great Day!

'Be Ready!' That's Jesus' word for us today. He promised that eventually he would return in great splendour and all heaven with him. He made it clear that it is not for us to know the dates and times of that special and final arrival. We just need to be aware that it is in his plan for our world. There will always be signs of restlessness in the nations and in the natural world which will shout at us *'Are you ready for Jesus? There's amazing happenings ahead.'*

In today's scripture Jesus speaks of strange movements among the stars; of whole countries despairing of war, sickness, roaring seas and higher tides, want and famine. Sounds familiar? He says, *Take note! Be alert! Pray for the church and the world with confident faith in God's sovereignty.*

I must add one more line to the Santa story with which I began. Santa gave a final wave and called back, *'Aren't we always ready?'*

A Prayer for Confident Trust in God (with Psalm 25 in mind)

Lord, my God, I trust you.
I am confident you will answer my prayers
in the best way for us all.
I trust you to teach me your truth and your way of life.
I trust you because you are my God, my Saviour, my Helper.

It should be easy to trust you when I consider
your kindness, mercy, and care in past days
when you have remembered me, forgiven me and relieved my anxieties.

When all about me is unsettled and uncertain
make my grip of faith more secure.
Thank you, Lord.

