

29th November 2020 First Sunday in Advent

Readings

Isaiah 64: 1 - 9

Psalm 80: 1 – 7, 17 - 19

1 Corinthians 1: 3 - 9

Mark 13: 24 - 37



Sign of Hope

Today, the first Sunday of Advent, we would normally be lighting the first candle on the Advent wreath in the morning service. This candle represents the centuries-long hopes and dreams of the prophets for the day when God will come to put the whole world right with him. What a fantastic dream! We share it still and we still have hope for the dream come true.

Hope is the theme for this Sunday. Christmas hopes for this year seem very uncertain at the moment and dreams will have to be built around the size of our family 'Christmas Bubble'. Whatever happens, nothing, not even a virus can stop it being a celebration of the most wonderful event in world history – the birth of Jesus – God coming into his everyday world.

We often share the heartache of prophets like Isaiah – *If God is almighty and all powerful, why doesn't he do something? Why doesn't he tear the heavens apart and come down here with us?* We have the answer to that. *He Has! He is doing! and He will come to complete it all!* Perhaps we fail to look for the signs of God doing something – signs of hope all around us. Just as it was in Bethlehem when Jesus was born. People slept, partied in the inns with census travellers and went about their usual business, while unobserved by them, all heaven sang to herald the birth of a baby - God doing something – the greatest thing. He came in that birth with the answer to all their needs, and ours. Who but a chosen few could have imagined amid the hustle and bustle of Rome-oppressed Bethlehem that the prophets' heart-cry was being answered. Their hope was becoming reality! And it continued to be answered as through Jesus, people like us were able to invite God into the turmoil of life, fixing hope now on the day when the same Jesus will come again in glory to complete the healing of humankind. I have often heard it asked *Where will it all end?* I am happy to reply, *It will end with Jesus – with God – with love!*

Paul is writing this week to Christians in Corinth. They are a church not untouched by the problems of the city's cosmopolitan society – its greed and corruption in commerce, its lax attitude to morality and its beliefs in a host of different philosophies and religions. The Christians were asking the same age-old question, *Why, Lord? When and where will it all end, Lord? When are you coming to fulfil the promise of your Kingdom?* Paul reminds them that the promise has not changed and they must keep hoping for the day when everything will be sorted and made plain.

*Hope depends on a promise made sure by knowing
and loving the one who made the promise. Isn't
that just like our childhood hope of 'what I shall get
for Christmas?*

Keep hoping. The way to maintain our hope is to hold on to our Lord's promise, and the way to hold on to the promise is to build our relationship with Jesus who made it. The Gospel reading speaks of that great and final day of *fireworks around the universes* when we shall see Jesus come with power and glory and angel hosts will be present just like the first time in Bethlehem. This time every eye will see him - even in the remotest place on earth. There is a warning note attached to the promise though. Like the first time there will be those who may miss it. The most important thing is to be ready by staying close to Christ in hope. There are helpful signs of encouragement everywhere. Like the dying leaves of autumn. Even before they fall there are already signs of new ones for next Spring!

A Prayer



Lord, let the dying autumn leaves be
my sure sign of hope in your promise of a
glorious Springtime