

ADVENT 1A 27-11-2022 *Revd Lorna Green*

Isaiah 2:1-5; Ps 122; Romans 13:9-14; *Matthew 24:36-44*

(Jesus said) 'But about that day and hour no one knows, neither the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. For as the days of Noah were, so will be the coming of the Son of Man. For as in those days before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day Noah entered the ark, and they knew nothing until the flood came and swept them all away, so too will be the coming of the Son of Man. Then two will be in the field; one will be taken and one will be left. Two women will be grinding meal together; one will be taken and one will be left. Keep awake therefore, for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming. But understand this: if the owner of the house had known in what part of the night the thief was coming, he would have stayed awake and would not have let his house be broken into. Therefore you also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an unexpected hour.'

When I was growing up, I loved the series of books written by C. S. Lewis about Narnia, beginning with 'The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe'. As an adult I read them to my children and enjoyed them all over again.

The sixth book in the series is called 'The Magician's Nephew', and in it Lewis describes a wood, which the children reach by magic. It is a kind of no-place, which Polly and Diggory come to call 'the Wood between the Worlds'. From that place they visit Charn, a dying world, and Narnia, at the dawn of its creation, before finally returning to their own world.

In the wood time is suspended, and they can hardly begin to imagine the trials and adventures that await them in the many different worlds they will visit.

Advent is like a 'wood between the worlds'. It is a time in the Christian calendar where we stand between two worlds: the world that cannot imagine Christ, and the world in which he comes to be the only picture of reality we have.

At this point, we stand in a world where God's great act of incarnation and redemption is just a shadow, a promise; a child growing in the womb, secretly, in the dark.

We do not know yet what this child will be like, or what his impact on our lives will be.

So Advent is a time of preparing to choose again. Which will we choose? Will we choose the world of the newly born child, where so many of our most dearly held ideas about God and ourselves will be challenged? Or will we choose the old world, where there is no life, no birth, but at least there is also no challenge?

Since 2020 we have all lived through challenging times, as the global pandemic changed our lives almost overnight. We had been doing our usual things: going to work, school, shopping, socialising, attending church- and then, suddenly, everything changed and the world seemed to stop in its tracks.

We learnt new skills in a hurry; we had no choice but to follow the rules. People started looking out for their neighbours in ways they hadn't before, and we hoped those good changes would stick. I'm not sure they have.

We didn't really have much choice about the changes and challenges we experienced during lockdowns and mandated restrictions. The world had changed, and we had to change with it.

Advent presents us with a choice, every year; will we prepare for challenge and change, or choose to live in the 'old world'?

The 'wood between the worlds' is a place of drowsiness because it is not a real place, and both the Letter to the Romans and the Gospel of Matthew warn us that the danger of the waiting period is sleep, oblivion, and unpreparedness.

Matthew reminds us that it is easy to live as though our world is real and secure, and as though there is no need to be watchful or ready for action. Until the moment they were swept away by the flood, he tells us, the people of Noah's day were carrying on their normal lives, oblivious to all the hammering and animal herding going on at Noah's place. Only Noah was prepared for what happened.

All the little pictures Matthew paints of people innocently getting on with their lives, or turning their backs just at the wrong moment- any one of them could be us, Matthew says.

Paul, in his letter to the Romans, also warns of the dangers of dozing off during this vital period when we need to prepare to make life-and-death decisions. He urges us to be ready for the dawn; don't go back to sleep now, because any minute the alarm will go off.

If Matthew and Paul are what we might think of as proper Advent readings, with their emphasis on preparation, Isaiah reminds us of what it's all for.

In his vision we see people from all parts of the world streaming towards the holy mountain. Why have they come? What are they looking for? It seems they are people who are sick of war, who know they have lost the ability to judge whether the fight is just or not. They long for peace, and to learn a new way of living.

These are people who have learned the hard way the cost of wrong choices- haven't we all? Now they ache to be taught, to be prepared for a different world.

Isaiah's own longing is seen in verse five, when he pleads, "O house of Jacob, come let **us** walk in the light of the Lord." He begs his own people to see what God is offering. If even the nations who have not known God can see that God is their heart's desire, surely Isaiah's people can see that too?

Perhaps if we, God's people, prepare ourselves to walk in God's light, we will make the path plain for others who are lost and longing. Or is it, to our shame, sometimes the other way around? Perhaps the desperate, those in total despair of the world they know, will lead **us** to God's path?

Choosing between the worlds is not easy. It needs to be prepared for, over and over again. Are we willing to get ready for the new world promised by Jesus? Are we willing to take up the challenge and prepared to be uncomfortable- or worse- as we wait for the coming of our Lord?