

SERMON ADVENT 1B
ALL SAINTS BIRKENHEAD 2020

Happy New Year!

Doesn't sound quite right does it? But today is New Year's Day for the Church. We begin once more the liturgical year when we live again through our worship the life of Christ. I know Advent is seen as a time of preparation for Christmas. Yes it certainly is that time, though it is much more than that.

Advent reminds us of the God who has come to us once and for all in the person of Jesus. So we look back at the revealing of God in this particular human being.

Advent reminds us of the God who will come at the end of time. SO we look forward to the great revealing of God in glory at the Day of the Lord.

Advent reminds us of the God who comes in the present. So we look in the midst of this present life to see God with us.

So Happy New Year! Happy Advent! Look back for God. Look forward for God. Look in the present for God. This is our preparation for Christmas; being on the lookout for the God of all ages.

The stories we hear tend to make us look back at the God who came in Jesus. In recent weeks the stories in worship have been concerned with looking forward to the end of time. But where do we see God in the present? Looking for God is like looking for the proverbial needle....so difficult to find!

Where is God in a world which keeps some nations poor and some rich? Where is God in a world where people keep using war as the only method of settling their differences? Where is God in a world where homeless people are left to wander without international help? Where is God in a world where illness is not cured. Where is God in our own struggles with what life gives us; be it sickness, loss of purpose, lack of work, the loss of loved ones. Not to mention that virus which has now become synonymous with this year of struggle, Coronavirus.

Like Isaiah we may cry out "God, you have hidden your face from us, you have delivered us into the hand of our iniquity."

The people Isaiah writes for are the people who have suffered disappointment and frustration. They had high hopes for a new and better life. Their hopes go unfulfilled. God seemingly hides his face.

2000 after the birth of Jesus we don't seem to be very much different from the people of Isaiah's day. Jesus was the one to reveal God in the midst of people. We look to him as a sign of God's love on earth. Never before or since have we seen so clearly what God is like. Yet with Isaiah we still want to shout at God, "O that you would tear open the heavens and come down."

Why can't we see more of the presence of God? Why doesn't God make himself more obvious in our world?

It is with questions like these that we begin to look for the return of Christ when God will be revealed in glory. That will be the time when all the wrongs of the world will be put right. That will be the time when the fullness of God's presence will be revealed. Then our hopes will be fulfilled.

We strain forward looking for the fullness of God's presence when the things which spoil life will be removed.

We look back to what we know of God in the past, that is Jesus the goodness of God was revealed to give hope for the future.

Here we are living between these two visions. The past vision of God in fullness in the person of Jesus and the future vision of God in fullness at the return of Christ. We live between the visions and God is found here too. Because God is here too we can rejoice with hope. We rejoice not because all is well, with the world.

We rejoice because of the signs of God we see in spite of the world's problems. We know it is possible to live in society in better ways than we do. We are even prepared to work for such a society. We may vote for a particular party at election time because we believe they will bring about a better society. We know the tough realities we see and sometimes experience are not the final word. The final word is God's, and it is to do with love. And we are prepared to be the loving people God wants in the world. That is what we choose when we choose to be Christian. This is our task in the time between the visions - to be the people of God committed to working for a more loving society. We will catch glimpses of the vision of God which help us to continue living in the in-between time.

Wherever we see the homeless of our world being cared for; when we participate in finding homes for the homeless, there we see God.

Whenever we see the leaders of the world seeking ways other than war to settle disputes; when we seek appropriate ways to settle our differences, there we see God.

Whenever we see researches seeking a cure for disease; whenever we care for the sick and suffering, there we see God.

Whenever we can create some small example of community, of bringing people together, there we see God.

God doesn't hide his face as much as we might think. We need to look for God in our midst. We need to be awake to the possibility of God being present. Too often we are asleep and never even expect to see our God who is at work among us.

The Gospel tells us we are the people left behind when the master went away. We are to stay awake, alert to the possibility of the master's return. We are to be alert to the signs of the master's presence in

what we do.

Out of our actions God's presence is seen. God is not far off if we make God's love felt. We cannot always take away the pain and suffering of life. We can though live as people of hope because we have seen the light of God's love. We are an Advent people living between the visions of God's fullness. We know that in the present God's love is shown through us. Because of God's love, we rejoice in hope.