



Being open

Reverend Judith Wigglesworth

Advent Sunday

3 December 2017

Isaiah 64:1-9

1 Corinthians 1:3-9

Mark 13:24-37

'Come Lord Jesus'. Come to us this day through your Word. Amen.

Advent is an interesting season. We say 'Come Lord Jesus', but what do we really mean? The clearest description of the Advent season I've seen for a while is in Tom Wright's recent book *Advent for Everyone*.

He writes:

"Advent means 'coming' or 'arrival'. The hymns and readings often used during this season seem to be about two quite different things: about waiting for the 'first coming', the birth of Jesus, and about waiting for his 'second coming' to put everything right in the end. How did these things get muddled up? How can we make wise, prayerful sense out of it all?"

The early Christians developed the 'church's year' as a way of telling, learning and reliving the story of Jesus, which stands at the heart of our faith. As they did so, they came to understand that it wasn't simply a matter of going round and round the same sequence and never getting anywhere. Think of a bicycle wheel; it goes round and round, but it is moving forwards, not standing still... So it is with the church's year. We go round the circuit: Advent, Christmas, Epiphany, Lent, Holy Week, Good Friday, Easter, Pentecost...sum[ming] all this up on Trinity Sunday, as we learn more deeply who our glorious God really is. But the

*point of it all is that, in doing this, we are not simply going round and round the same topics and never getting anywhere. We are signing on as part of God's larger project, God's forward purposes, God's plans for the whole of creation to be renewed, so that, (as the prophets said), the earth will be full of the glory of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea."*¹

In Advent we look back to the ancient people of God and follow the story of the hope expressed by the prophets like Isaiah, and we re-tell the story of Jesus' human birth. Yet we also look forward, leaning into the future with a sense of anticipation to the fulfilment of God's vision for wholeness, for heaven to fully come on earth.

We know when the first Advent happened: about 2017 years ago. We don't know when the second Advent will come, but our Gospel reading today reminds us to be ready and awake.

Today the 'bicycle wheel' has come around to our annual Advent again. Yet the whole bicycle is moving forward in that 'big picture' space between the very first Advent, and the second Advent yet to come.

How are we called to live in this particular season, in this space? Over the next four weeks in our preaching we'll explore four ways. Today, it's about 'being open'.

First, being open to God. Today on Advent Sunday preachers all over our land and across the world may be referring to the hustle and bustle and commercial hype about Christmas these days, and contrasting that with the Advent call to slow down and use these weeks as a time of preparation and reflection.

I echo that call. Use this precious season to reflect on the readings of Advent and to ponder the prayers we say as we light each of the candles on our beautiful Advent wreath in the coming weeks.

Be open to be shaped by God, who in our reading from Isaiah is likened to a potter: *'All of us are God's handiwork'*. This doesn't mean we are passive. It means we are created by God, who desires to continually shape and re-create us more and more in the likeness of God. Being open to that creative process means being open to surprising ways that God might come to us in a fresh way,

¹ Tom Wright, *Advent for Everyone – A Journey with the Apostles*, SPCK, 2017.

cause us to pause, to notice or receive an unexpected blessing. This might be through the wonder of creation; through 'Christ in all creation' presented to us so beautifully last week. Or it may be through the loving words or actions of someone else. A spirit of openness to God means that we expect God to show up and to desire to connect with us. In the words of Paul writing to the Corinthians, *God is faithful, and God calls us into fellowship.*

Second, being open to others. I encourage you to balance your personal Advent reflectiveness with an openness to share the good news of Advent with people you meet. But how? Where do I start?

After Communion I invite you to collect a purple Advent ribbon. Wear it each day in Advent. Pin it on your clothes every morning, tie it around your wrist, or attach it to your sunhat, your keyring, or your bag. Be open and ready to explain what it means when people ask you: 'What's that ribbon for?' If each of us is asked that question, even once a day, every day in Advent, imagine how many people we'll share the Advent message with this year.

Let us pray:

Creator God,

bless these ribbons as symbols of Advent.

*May they help us recall the birth of your Son Jesus,
and believe in your promise of renewal for all.*

*We pray for courage to tell the Advent story
and to say with confidence 'Come, Lord Jesus'.*

Amen

