

Sunday 29th November 2020 – Bulwell United Reformed Church

Today is the first Sunday of Advent - a time in which we are encouraged to stay alert to God's purposes in our lives. In the reading for today, Mark 13: 24-37 Jesus speaks of coming dark days when people will be close to losing hope. He urges them therefore to stay awake to signs that offer hope of the coming deliverance, which will certainly come, though at an unexpected time. *A short service for personal communion focusing on confessing Jesus is Lord is included. Please have your bread & wine/juice ready.*

Call to worship

As we enter Advent,
we come before God in praise and thanksgiving, rejoicing that in Jesus
we have a friend who shares our present troubles
and gives us the tangible hope of brighter tomorrows.
The Lord will comfort, and the Lord will save.

A prayer of confession

Lord God, when we prefer comfort to change, challenge us.
When we are distracted not attentive, forgive us.
When we are feeble not faithful, strengthen us.
And, at all times, transform our dreams into your realities.
In Jesus' name. **Amen.**

Our Father

Song **Tell out my soul the greatness of the Lord**

[\(277\) Tell Out my Soul - Lyrics Video - YouTube](#)

Mark 13: 24-37

²⁴ 'But in those days, following that distress,

“the sun will be darkened,
and the moon will not give its light;

²⁵ the stars will fall from the sky,
and the heavenly bodies will be shaken.”^[a]

²⁶ 'At that time people will see the Son of Man coming in clouds with great power and glory. ²⁷ And he will send his angels and gather his elect from the four winds, from the ends of the earth to the ends of the heavens.

²⁸ 'Now learn this lesson from the fig-tree: as soon as its twigs get tender and its leaves come out, you know that summer is near. ²⁹ Even so, when you see these things happening, you know that it^[b] is near, right at the door. ³⁰ Truly I tell you, this generation will certainly not pass away until all these things have happened. ³¹ Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away.

The day and hour unknown

³² 'But about that day or hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. ³³ Be on guard! Be alert^[c]! You do not know when that time will come. ³⁴ It's



like a man going away: he leaves his house and puts his servants in charge, each with their assigned task, and tells the one at the door to keep watch.

³⁵ 'Therefore keep watch because you do not know when the owner of the house will come back – whether in the evening, or at midnight, or when the cock crows, or at dawn. ³⁶ If he comes suddenly, do not let him find you sleeping. ³⁷ What I say to you, I say to everyone: "Watch!"' (NIVUK)

Watching and Waiting – Mark 13: 24-37

The name Advent was taken from a very old title of the Christmas period, *De Adventu Domini*, 'Of the Coming of the Lord.' As we are aware, the great figures of Advent are Isaiah, John the Baptist and the Virgin Mary – those who prepared for and co-operated with the incarnation of the Son of God. But as far as the lectionary is concerned, in the Middle Ages, another note began to sound during Advent, that of Christ's Second Coming and this is where today's reading, Mark 13: 24-37 fits in.

So the Gospel reading for this week is not the kind of passage we automatically think about when we're kicking off Advent and turning our attention to "the most wonderful time of the year." Mark talks about how "the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light."

Watching the news can be a destabilising experience. As images of wars, earthquakes and famines roll before us, we wonder how to retain faith in God's good purposes. Nearer to home, the challenge of COVID-19, lockdowns, redundancy, serious illness and criminal behaviour can turn lives upside down. How are we to react? Whom are we to blame? The reading shows that human beings have long struggled with these questions. But the message of the first Sunday of Advent is to put our trust in God and walk the path in front of us.

The season of Advent is about expectation, about waiting for Christ although not just about waiting for the baby in the manger. It is about expecting Christ here, in our own lives, right now. This passage may be about Jesus' second coming, but I think it speaks to us also in the here and now. We are called to be on the lookout for the big return, but we are also to be aware of the many ways Christ appears in the present. Are we alert to see where Christ arrives, breaking through time and space to be present in our lives and the lives of others? And—more to the point—are we willing to be his hands and feet?

In the middle of this Gospel reading, Jesus decides to tell a short parable about a man who goes on a trip and leaves his servants in charge. Each servant is given a job to do, but the head of the household never tells them when he will return. He only tells the doorkeeper to be alert. The household staff is simply to keep doing their jobs.

As we wait for Christ to return, we have jobs to do. What are those jobs? In Mark 6, Jesus gives his apostles authority to preach repentance, cast out demons, and heal the sick. As part of the church today we are called to preach to people to change their hearts and lives; we are called to speak out against injustice and to help the sick, the lonely, and

the forgotten and in the past few months we have been learning new ways to do this - in a sense living out the thrust of this passage.

This week's text then offers a twofold message: Be busy with what Jesus has called us to do as we wait for his return and be alert to how and where Jesus appears in our own lives. We may not know what is to come, but we know Who is to come.

A prayer of intercession

In the darkness of winter,
and in anticipation of Christ's coming,
we pray.

Come, O come, Emmanuel.

To all who lead us:
those who make plans that shape our lives
and our communities,
give courage.

Come, O come, Emmanuel.

To all who support us:
those who are there when we need them,
give courage.

Come, O come, Emmanuel.

To all who are in need:
the sick and the suffering,
the poor and the hungry,
the lost, the lonely and those in despair,
give courage.

Come, O come, Emmanuel.

To your Church:
awaiting your coming to transform the world,
give courage.

Come, O come, Emmanuel.

Amen.

Please add your prayers for others you wish to pray for today . . .

Song Be still

[\(278\) Be Still For The Presence Of The Lord - Lyric Video - YouTube](#)

HOLY COMMUNION - Advent Thanksgiving

We praise you
That through his coming
Your promises given by the prophets were fulfilled,
And that the day of our deliverance has dawned;
And, as we look for the triumph of his kingdom,
We exult with holy joy.



We thank you that Jesus was born among us
that he lived our common life on earth;
that he suffered and died for us; that he rose again;
and that he is always present through the Holy Spirit.

We thank you that we can live in the faith
that your kingdom will come,
and that in life, in death and beyond death
you are with us.

Therefore with all the company of heaven,
and with all your people,
of all places and times,
we proclaim your greatness and sing your praise.

**Holy, holy, holy Lord
God of power and might,
Heaven and earth are full of your glory.
Hosanna in the highest.**

Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.
Hosanna in the highest.

The Breaking of the Bread

The Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed
took bread and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said,
'This is my body which is for you.
Do this in remembrance of me.'
In the same way also the cup saying,
'This cup is the new covenant in my blood.
Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.'

Prayer after communion

God of a love stronger than death, you have given us new birth into a living hope through
the gift of your Son. God with us, like a mother you have fed us with yourself and
strengthened us for journeying ahead. God of truth and power, you take our weakness and
our sin and refashion us by grace.

A sending out prayer

Everlasting God, help us, this week,
to see the world through your eyes.
Give us the patience and persistence
to allow you to do those things
we cannot achieve by our own strength.
Help us to know your presence
in a real way, so that we can share your love with others.
Amen.



