

**TALK ADVENT SUNDAY 28<sup>th</sup> November 2021**

*Luke 21: 25-36 1 Thessalonians 3: 9-13 Jeremiah 33: 14-16*

Do you find it easy to get wound up about what's happening in the world around us. Perhaps you pick up a French paper and find items about criminal activity, drug abuse, neglect or abuse of vulnerable people, disputes between neighbours, or at a national level, problems with immigration, taxation, or the social media. Amongst our own acquaintances or neighbours, we may know that many are deeply unhappy with their lives.

Don't we sometimes wonder where and when someone might emerge who is able to establish some sort of fair order in the world. In Advent, the start of another Christian year, our readings today remind us that we should let the example of our Lord determine our reaction to people and events.

Through our baptism, we are made part of the body of Christ -part of what the prophet Jeremiah, 600 years before Christ, referred to as a Messiah. We, as Christians, believe, that this is a reference to Christ, *God with us in the person of Jesus, to bring us back to himself.*

As the local branch of Christ's Church we have the potential and calling to bring hope into the communities in which we live, to work for justice for all, and to demonstrate goodness and holiness in an, everyday way that is attractive to our friends and neighbours. But that doesn't make life easy for us.

In his letter to the Church in Thessalonica, as we've just heard, Paul compliments them on remaining faithful. He urges them to continue to love one another, and everyone else they meet. In that way, they can be confident of meeting Christ when he comes again.

Paul argues that God's kingdom grows and flourishes when people actively care about and look out for each other, when they celebrate and make use of each others interests and skills, and look outwards to encourage those who have not yet heard the good news. We must make every effort to enable others to hear that good news and respond to Christ's offer of salvation.

We are coming into a time of year when, along with most branches of the Church, we in the Vendée and Deux-Sevres may well be welcoming people who rarely engage with Church at other points in the year. The warmth of welcome we give, the care and hospitality we show - the integrity of our worship- and the love we have for each other and for visitors will be a symbol - a symbol of hope, of God's love for all, and that just could make a difference in someone's life.

Then, in our Gospel reading from Luke, Jesus encourages us to stand up, raise our heads, and to look for signs of God's kingdom amongst all the turmoil of the world we now live in. As Christians, we should not be fearing the things that go on around us. We should be standing tall, as symbols of hope for our communities.

If we get knocked back by the struggles, confusion, worries and brokenness of our world, we will not be able to shine the light of Christ to others. We must be alert and watchful for the signs of God at work in the world - and then be prepared to keep others informed.

Luke was talking about seeing positive signs of God at work in times of turmoil and persecution, while Paul was talking at a time of growth and joy in the Church in Thessalonica and trying to ensure Christians were not complacent but maintained an attitude of positive urgency in their preparation for the future .

So what's God calling us to do?

How do we wait intelligently, noting the signs of God at work, yet also preparing ourselves for the coming again of Christ? The readings today suggest that the key is for us to know what we are preparing for! Our task is to make sure we will recognise him when he comes.

In France recently we have seen many of the charities which, through volunteers, organise the collection and distribution of food to those in need, along with those which offer friendship and social care, gearing up for the Christmas period, - when so many individuals and families feel particularly disadvantaged. Many Christians are involved in these and other charities but so are non-Christians. So what's our Christian responsibility and contribution to God's promised kingdom.

How can we in All Saints Vendée make a real difference in this locality ? A major aim in Advent is that we reflect on and learn more about God's characteristics, as demonstrated by Christ, so that we may recognise him when he comes again. But this is not simply an academic exercise.

In our dealings with each other, and with any new people we meet, we are called to be ready, and to respond with the love, warmth and genuine concern that our Lord displayed.

So, this Advent let's be beacons of hope, symbols of God's love - reliable and faithful to our commitment come what may. The people around us, in church or in the community, will not be drawn to Christ by our simply agreeing with their fears, but by our Christian good news of hope, conveyed not just by what we say -but by how we live, and how we react in their hour of need.