

Signs!

Jeremiah 33¹⁴⁻¹⁶; Psalm 25¹⁻⁹; 1 Thessalonians 3^{9-end}; Luke 21²⁵⁻³⁶

Now when these things begin to take place, stand up and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near. [Luke 21²⁸]

Welcome to the Church's New Year - we don't start with Christmas as that would be too frivolous. We start with a period of reflection and preparation - reminding ourselves of why it was necessary for God to become human.

Traditionally, Advent explores the themes of death, heaven, hell, Christ's second coming and judgement (some priests wore black gloves during this season as a sign of how serious these themes are). the flickering light of the Advent Candle shows the vulnerability and the strength of the hope we have.

As we begin to think about the readings for today it is a bit like having toothache and having to go to the dentist. You know that it won't be a pleasurable experience (nor a cheap one) but enduring the treatment will be worth it for the relief that it brings.

Jeremiah certainly points forward to the hope of safety that the coming of the Messiah will bring.

Paul's letter to the Thessalonians talks about the real strength that there is within the loving community of faith, the faith that gives us confidence that we will be able to stand on the day of judgement.

Yet it is the Gospel that has such resonance with the world as it is around us now:

- ✦ How many have felt the realisation of Jesus' warning - **people will faint from fear and foreboding of what is coming upon the world?**
- ✦ The threat from terrorism and how the leaders of the nations posture and threaten don't give much confidence. Certainly, there is **distress among the nations.**

We want Jesus words to be true that **this generation will not pass away until all things have taken place.**

Those things are our **redemption** and the **kingdom of God** established.

Yet we are God's people and God's people has been established - it is for us to live even if everyone around us can't see it! When Jesus died and rose from the dead our fear of death was conquered and our focus was not on a comfortable world now but on being with God when our earthly journey is done.

It is how we respond to threats and things that make us anxious that reveal how much difference God has made to our lives - whether we are people who wait in hope or people who just give up!

- ✦ The first response that Jesus identifies is that we give up. Of course you can squander your resources (that's what **dissipation** means) believing that there is no point conserving them because someone is probably going to steal them or blow them up; we can get **drunk** in the hope of reaching oblivion so that we are unaffected; we can **worry** so much that we become dysfunctional. It's an option - a senseless, selfish, futile option - but an option it remains.
- ✦ The better response according to Jesus is to be **alert so that we know what is going on; pray** because only God can really make any difference; and remember that we all have to **stand before the Son of Man** and it is he who will judge.

I remember the Romanian revolution in the mid 1980's. The call from the people that inspired the transformation of that country was:

*If not us, who?
If not now, when?*

So

- ✦ the call is to live as if God's kingdom was a universal reality - and then it may just begin to be so;
- ✦ the call is to live a life of prayer, facing the issues in our world head on in peace - and then and only then the world may begin to change;
- ✦ the call is to be a people of hope anticipating God's final intervention in time and space - and then we will have security and peace.

*If not us, who?
If not now, when?*