

### **Wilful Waiting!**

Isaiah 64<sup>1-9</sup>; Psalm 80<sup>1-8</sup>; 1 Corinthians 1<sup>3-9</sup>; Mark 13<sup>24-end</sup>

*God is faithful! (1 Corinthians 1<sup>9</sup>)*

You have heard the readings:

- ✦ **O that you would tear open the heavens and come down so that the mountains would quake at your presence** (Isaiah 64<sup>1</sup>)
- ✦ **Stir up your mighty strength and come to our salvation** (Psalm 80<sup>3</sup>)
- ✦ **He will strengthen you to the end so that you may be blameless on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ** (1 Corinthians 1<sup>8</sup>)
- ✦ **Then they will see the Son of Man coming in clouds with great power and glory** (Mark 13<sup>26</sup>)

We prepare for the arrival of God in the baby born to the Virgin Mary by reminding ourselves of a much more robust view of faith.

Instead of God being confined or compressed into 6 lb of noise, appetite and mess we remind ourselves of the sort of God that chooses such restrictions.

Instead of God being limited to a particular time and space we remind ourselves that this is the God who holds time and space and chooses how and when he visits it.

God isn't tamed or contained in or by the humanity of Jesus - he remains free to be God and through Advent we celebrate this and stand in awe of God as we wait for Christmass.

So how do we respond to this God?

- ✦ Isaiah reminds us of how we relate to God: **we are the clay, you are the potter**. I confess that I am no craftsman or artist but, while reflecting on this, I compared a carpenter (not sure where in inspiration for that came from) and a potter. A carpenter has to respect the wood and go with the grain - and most of us would like God to do that with us - to respect who we are and carve something in keeping with what is ingrained in us. But a

potter takes something shapeless and is totally responsible for what it becomes. **We are the clay!** God is God and can make of us what he will.

- ✦ The Psalmist is clearer on what we have to invite God to do for us - **turn us again, O God; show the light of your countenance and we shall be saved**. We are coming to that season of year when anyone with young children or grandchildren have to attend performances at school: they look round to find you in the throng and all that is needed in response is a smile. We, too, need to see God's smile - which he gives willingly to those who look for it.
- ✦ Paul reminds us that **God is faithful** and that **you are not lacking in any spiritual gift as you wait for the revealing of our Lord Jesus Christ**. Do we need to say anything about the importance of having the right gifts in these weeks before Christmass? God knows what we need and has already made it available. The only potential difficulty comes when people don't use the gift God has given them. I have no idea why Christians are so embarrassed or shamed by their faith - how surprised I was to see the JW's out by the Coop in sub-zero temperatures recruiting when the Christian Church finds it difficult to get people out of their houses for worship! Why would God give gifts that would lie dormant and unused? Why do Christians think faith is about receiving and not giving?
- ✦ Jesus tells us that we have to **keep awake!** We live always under the promise (hopefully, not the threat) that Christ will return. We are warned not to be obsessed by the detail of this: only God knows that, so **Beware, keep alert; for you do not know when the time will come**. What matters is consistency. Consistency in our Christian living and our Christian witness!

My favourite film is 'Goodbye Mr Chips!' (the 1939 version). In it the rather extravagant wife secured by the repressed classics master has a conversation with the disciplinarian Head master about encouraging boys rather than punishing them. She tells the story of the wager between the north wind and the sun about getting a chap to take his coat off. The wind tried to blow it off by force and the sun won by warming his so that he responded willingly.

How tempting it is today to preach like the north wind - living under the fear of Jesus second coming and the judgement of God so that we do what we must and thereby perpetuate fear in faith.

But the sun-like approach reminds us of God's faithfulness and his gifts: that doesn't make him any less controllable as God - it changes why we do what we should.