

Worship for the first Sunday in Advent

29th November 2020

from Brian and Clare Kennard

Opening sentence: “Now is our salvation nearer than when we first believed” (Romans 13:11)

Hymn: *Come, Thou long-expected Jesus*

Come, thou long expected Jesus
Born to set thy people free
From our fears and sins release us
Let us find our rest in thee

Israel's strength and consolation
Hope of all the earth thou art
Dear desire of every nation
Joy of every longing heart

Born thy people to deliver
Born a child and yet a king
Born to reign in us forever
Now thy gracious kingdom bring

By thine own eternal spirit
Rule in all our hearts alone
By thine own sufficient merit
Raise us to thy glorious throne

Prayer time:

Special prayer (“Collect”) for today:

ALMIGHTY God, give us grace that we may cast away the works of darkness, and put upon us the armour of light, now in the time of this mortal life, in which Thy Son Jesus Christ came to visit us in great humility; that in the last day, when he shall come again in his glorious Majesty, to judge both the quick and the dead, we may rise to the life immortal; through him who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, now and ever. Amen.

A confession:

Please make this prayer your own, reading carefully and thoughtfully:

“Create in me a clean heart O God, and renew a right spirit within me.” (Psalm 51:10)

Bible readings:

If you have a Bible of your own, please read
Psalm 80: 1-7 & 17-19

Gospel reading: 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;

²⁵the stars will fall from the sky,
and the heavenly bodies will be shaken.

²⁶“At that time people will see the Son of Man coming in clouds with great power and glory.

²⁷And 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. ²⁹Even so, when you see these things happening, you know that it is near, right at the door. ³⁰Truly I tell you, this generation will certainly not pass away until all these things have happened. ³¹Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away.

³²“But about that day or hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. ³³Be on guard! Be alert! You do not know when that time will come. ³⁴It'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 rooster crows, or at dawn. ³⁶If he comes suddenly, do not let him find you sleeping. ³⁷What I say to you, I say to everyone: ‘Watch!’”

Meditation

“The future’s bright, the future’s Orange.”

Not a text from the Bible, but an advertising slogan for a mobile phone company from some years ago. Since that provider no longer exists, we may well conclude the slogan was misplaced optimism. How bright is the future - for the human race, for our planet or for each

individual? Like the mobile phone company, there have been plenty of examples of erroneous optimism - resting on human ingenuity and ability, such as the claim that nuclear power when first introduced in the 1950s would "provide electricity too cheap to meter". Hmm, it didn't quite turn out like that did it and we are now faced with a fantastic bill to make safe former nuclear power plants.

The opposite is unmitigated pessimism, and that is probably more the view we hear today. But, what is the biblical view? Very simply, things are going to get bad, but then much, much better. Not by human ingenuity, but because the King is coming back to reign! That's why we pray so often, "Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done" ... Where? **On earth.**

Advent is not (as so often said) getting ready for Christmas. It is getting ourselves ready for the return of the King. So many of Jesus' parables and teachings are about this very issue.

The Kingdom isn't here yet in all its fulness - that hardly needs to be said, does it? Jesus has already demonstrated for all people the rule of God here on earth - overcoming ignorance, sickness and death. This is enough to show God's Kingdom is not an impossible fantasy: it happened in history (Have you noticed how many biblical events are referenced to actual people and places - these are not "cleverly made up stories" as St. Peter puts it) and it's promised again, only on a world-wide scale.

It will happen, but only God can bring it about. As the OT prophet reminds us, "Not by (human) might nor by power, but by My Spirit, says the Lord." (Zechariah 4:6). So, we can just put our feet up and wait for it all to come about, then?

Of course not! Marxists, wanting to bring about Communist revolution, see themselves as "speeding up the march of history" - giving history a shove forward. Interestingly, the apostle Peter seems to suggest we actually can do just that: "as you look forward to that day and speed its coming" (2 Peter 3: 12, but read the whole chapter if you can). In the parable of the great feast (Luke 14:23), the servants of the King are busy seeking to call as many as will respond to come to the banquet. And so finally to today's Gospel reading, and it's Jesus who is speaking to us: I say to everyone: 'Watch!' (v36)

"Even so, come Lord Jesus." (Revelation 22:20)

Prayer time.

In your own words, remember before God:

- those in authority in this country and around the world grappling with the present crisis and the many other difficult problems humanity faces;
- all those "on the front line" whether NHS staff, transport workers, shop workers, the emergency services;
- those most personally affected by the Covid-19 outbreak: the bereaved, those seriously ill, those who have already lost their jobs;
- the Church of Jesus Christ as together we seek to witness to the love and care of God in word and action;
- that people everywhere would recognise that those of every race and language are made in the image of God and that we are all one in Christ;
- and for yourself and your family.
- Remember, too, thankfulness!

The Lord's Prayer (traditional version):

Our Father, who art in heaven,
hallowed be thy Name;
thy kingdom come;
thy will be done;
on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread.
And forgive us our trespasses,
as we forgive those who trespass against us
And lead us not into temptation;
but deliver us from evil.
For Thine is the kingdom,
the power, and the glory,
for ever and ever. Amen.

The blessing:

Now may the blessing of Almighty God, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, be with and remain with us always.

Amen.