



2nd Sunday of Advent 2020

Readings: St Paul's Epistle to the Romans 15.4-13

The Holy Gospel according to St Luke 21.25-33

What a year. What a mess.

Wherever you're sitting, and your experience of 2020, that is a universal truth.

Good News: with Advent we start a new Christian year. A fresh start. But, let's not pretend the mess is over. In just about every sphere of life at the moment there is confusion and fragility.

And this is where I want us to look at our apse again. In Advent we prepare for Christ's second coming, as well as to celebrate His first. In our apse we see Christ as King and Judge – the new creation that will only be consummated when this world draws to a close. And it is full of confusion and colour. Just as the Biblical accounts are. Our apse, our Scriptures' talking of the end of this world and the establishing of the Kingdom of Heaven, just like our current lived experience; all are a riot of confusion and colour.

For a start, they don't even all look particularly happy amongst the be-crowned 24 elders before the Throne of the Lamb! The coming glory in today's Gospel is awesome and disturbing in equal measure. It's confusing.

We find in the apse, in the revelation of Holy Scripture and in our experience of Christian living in our own day to day life: being a follower of Jesus doesn't make life tidy. It doesn't stop life being messy and complicated, fragile and deeply mixed bag.

So, with what confidence does St Paul write to us this morning? 'May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.' St Paul himself

who knew the frailty of his own human condition, the hardships of sickness, deprivation, prejudice, the breakdown of relationship, pestilence and death. What ‘peace in believing?’ what ‘joy’ and ‘power’? As he was executed for being a Jesus follower?

I think a helpful image might be a golden thread...

Our faith doesn’t tidy, censor or sanitise our experience. Instead, all our experience as individuals, as communities, and indeed as a whole human story can be seen as one in which a golden thread is running. From the chaos and divine energy which we call the Big Bang, through the manure and donkey sweat of a Bethlehem stable to the chaos of our own time and lives, this story, this history, tangled and alloyed as it is, is *going somewhere*. And that *telos*, found in the thread of gold that runs throughout it transfigures every other thread that makes up the tapestry.

To use another image: the orchestra. Advent brings home, something that is true of all Christian life: it is the thrill of the orchestra. Being but a part of this great movement. This great surging, throbbing tidal wave of truth and beauty. Like a great orchestral symphony. This is not an adjunct to our lives – an hour on a Sunday – this *is* the fundament of history and the fabric of our little lives within in. We are but a part of this story, and despite our silly assertions we are not the star. This great story, The Great Story (capital T, capital G, capital S) in which we find our lives; in which the meaning of them, and the fullness of them is to be found, as it can be found nowhere else, is what we are being invited to become tangled in this Advent. To do anything less would simply be unreal, to blindfold ourselves, and pretend the universe is not what it is.

In the chaos of life, in the clamour of the Advent readings, in the drama unfolding in our apse and on the stage of human history, we can see God’s golden thread entangling us that we might see the great and glorious reality, so much more real than anything we might otherwise

fill our lives with. A glimpse of disturbing awe. The truth that fills a man with 'joy', 'power' and 'peace' in the midst of disaster. A golden thread.

A tiny child who is God himself, vulnerable and weak who has come to abolish death.