Choral Eucharist: Advent Sunday 2021
The Priest Pastor

He’s coming back!

Jesus will come back and sort out the mess this world has got into. He’s got to come back because we can’t save ourselves, however hard we try. Without him, we are going to implode.

Yes, he really is coming back. Not as an attractive idea, or theological concept. But actually coming back. He came once, unexpectedly, in the flesh to redeem the world. In solid, living, breathing being. In actualite. Many missed Jesus’ first coming: no-one will miss his second coming. ‘Every eye will see him, we are told in Revelation, ‘even those who pierced him’. That’s really the heart of Advent. Yes, we prepare to celebrate his birth at Christmas. Yes, the Church’s new year begins. But essentially, this is the season when we anticipate those words from the Creed: He shall come again in glory to judge the living and the dead, and His Kingdom will have no end.’ We anticipate those words at the heart of our eucharist: Christ has died, Christ has risen, Christ will come again. And we yearn for Jesus’ return, to execute justice and righteousness, even though it is an awe inspiring prospect.

Are we ready? No! We are not ready. We are weary, confused, drained, faithless. But we yearn for liberation. We have hopes, dreams, fears, and sorrows. Struggles that we feel entrap us. We are strangers and pilgrims on this earth, looking to our eternal home with God. Deep inside there is a sense that we are made for something beyond this world, that is just beyond our grasp. Nothing on this earth can fill that longing.

Many years ago I was a Fire Brigade Chaplain. I spent a lot of time visiting fire stations, and even went out on a night time call
in an engine. And yes, they did give me a firefighters calendar, but I didn’t put it on my study wall!

As I walked into the stations through the fire engine bays, I was always greeted by the same sight – rows and rows of boots, with fire retardant leggings sticking out of them, in instant readiness for the firefighters to leap straight into them at the first sound of the bell.

And as we sat drinking tea, I never quite knew whether the bell would go, the firefighters would depart, and I would end up sitting on my own with six half drunk mugs steaming in front of me. It did happen a couple of times. The firefighters themselves never knew when the bell would go, and when it did, whether it was a hoax call, someone’s bonfire out of control or a terrible road accident with people trapped in blazing cars. They were prepared for anything, and they had found a way to get used to the waiting and the not knowing, having a laugh, cooking a curry, but being alert all the time. I admired them for that.

‘Keep alert’, ‘Keep awake’ says Jesus in today’s gospel. Alertness isn’t anxiety. It isn’t worry. Especially at the moment when we have had enough of all that. Maybe at the moment being alert is just letting the spirit raise our eyes from the immediate mess of life to that which is greater, that which is beyond, that which is to come. Asking God to open our eyes to joy and hope, his presence in everything, a point of calm in the turning world. Because the Lord is here, his spirit is with us, and Jesus will return.

When we are weak, God is here. When we are the furthest from being alert it is possible to be, God is here. When we are exhausted and conflicted God is here. Maybe beginning a post pandemic Advent, isn’t stressing about doing lots of things, not adding to an exhausting to do list, but practising a holy pause. Letting go and letting God. Letting him set the agenda for a Holy Advent.

He is coming as judge but also as redeemer, saviour, friend and brother. He is coming as our beloved, our healer and our friend.

We may not have to fight fires or cut people out of cars. But if we can let go, and let God be, in our hearts, we will begin the process of becoming alert as firefighters have to be every day. As the prayer book puts it, we have no power of ourselves to
help ourselves. We are living between the first coming that gave us hope, and the second coming that will fulfil that hope.

He’s coming back! Soon and very soon. Even so, Come Lord Jesus!