

WEEKLY SERMON

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Be alert to proclaim the words and works of God

As a Curate, I am still 'in training' before I can become an incumbent of my own parish.

Alongside the other Curates of Blackburn Diocese I have regular training days.

In October I attended one on the subject of 'Leadership and Prayer' which was brilliantly led by The Right Rev Stephen Cottrell, the Bishop of Chelmsford.

We covered many things but there was one part that really resonated with me; which I think especially speaks to us all as a Church as we now move into the time of Advent.

Advent is a time of preparation; a time of expectant watching and waiting for the celebrations of Christmas; the birth of Jesus and also a time of looking ahead to Christ coming again.

In an exercise, Bishop Stephen got us to consider the words of Declaration which were said at our ordinations; in particular the words which say we, as Priests, are called to be servants, shepherds, messengers, watchmen and stewards.

We were then asked which particular role we felt called to (all of course being equally important!). For me, I felt strongly that I am called to be a 'watchman'. What does this mean? And, what has it got to do with Advent?

In the Bible, especially the Old Testament, as a 'watchman' you would be a guard; probably stationed on a high tower or on city walls watching out for enemy threats and dangers.

Ever vigilant, watching and waiting patiently, not only against foes but also looking out for friends; keeping the harvest fields safe and announcing as a sentinel the start of a new day.

Spiritually, watchmen are also prophets, listening to God and being bold to speak His word of warning, correction or destruction if people had turned away from God's way. In the New Testament, church leaders are to be watchmen by watching over the souls of those entrusted to them, hence why the role is included in the Ordinal.

However, this is also a role for all Christians in their walk with God; all Christians are watchmen and watchwomen! Why, because especially at this time of Advent, we need to be watching out and be ready for the Lord's return...

"Be dressed for action and have your lamps lit; be like those who are waiting for their master to return from the wedding banquet ... if the owner of the house had known at what hour the thief was coming, he would not have let his house be broken into. You also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an unexpected hour." (Luke 12:35-40)

HEALTHY CHURCHES TRANSFORMING COMMUNITIES

So, this Advent, watch and wait; be a watchman who is looking out for the signs of God's new creation in our churches and communities. Be a watchman who sees and perceives what God is doing and joins in; but also aware of where the enemy may strike.

Be a watchman; ready, alert to act and proclaim the words and works of God. Watch and wait with wonder during Advent, our time of preparation, as we then look to welcoming the baby that has turned history on its head and continues to transform us until He comes again in glory. Have a blessed Advent and Christmas.

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