

+WEEKLY SERMON

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Advent – Waiting for Jesus

Luke 21:25-36

This Sunday marks the start of Advent; the start of the season when we wait expectantly for the coming of Jesus.

We're waiting for Christmas, and already there are signs of Christmas around us. Christmas lights, Christmas music, Christmas parties.

I heard my first carol on the radio the other day, and it lifted my spirits. Soon Christian communities will gather to celebrate the coming of the Christ Child – the coming of God to save us from sin and death. What is happening in your local church, and mine, this Christmas is beautiful. I can't wait!

And yet, I also wonder, between mouthfuls of mince pie, whether perhaps we should be waiting a bit more, anticipating the feast a little less.

Our very Christmassy Advents can be an uncomfortable reminder that we're not very good at waiting. One sign of that is the turkey dinner we're eating in mid-December.

Perhaps we're not good at waiting because we can often feel – like the ancient Stoics – that nothing new ever happens. The Stoics believed that history goes round in circles. And our postmodern age can often believe that life is just one thing after another, with no meaning in itself – so we're each free to impose our own meaning on life, so long as we let everyone else do the same thing.

If that sounds familiar, then our Bible reading – set in the lectionary for this Sunday – offers us a radically different picture. It tells us that history is going somewhere.

For Christians, history is a train travelling towards a destination – and that destination is the coming of Jesus in glory to establish his eternal kingdom.

Everything in history finds its hope in relation to this destination. Christian hope is not about naïve optimism that somehow 'things will work out'. Indeed, our reading talks at some length about things not working out.

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Rather, our reading speaks about God intervening, and creating anew, starting over, because he loves us. It is for this reason nothing 'will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord' (Romans 8:39).

Everything in our lives also finds its meaning and place in relation to this destination. Each of our decisions are either building towards the goal of history or working against it.

Do my decisions, my choices, my responses to the joys and trials of life – do they give glory to Jesus?

Rt Rev Dr Joe Kennedy, Bishop of Burnley