

ADVENT 2024 Luke 21: 25-36

It could very easily be written about today: "on the earth distress among nations, confused by the roaring of the sea and their waves.....fear and foreboding of what is coming upon the world"

.....then they will see "the Son of Man coming in a cloud with great power and glory" ...

Listening and watching the news about current conflict and wars, and add to that the very real crisis of global warming..... the highly unsatisfactory ending to the COP 29 negotiations as poorer and vulnerable countries may well literally go under.....

Are we then moving toward the 'end time'?

It may well feel like that.

We might be helped to note that humans have been here before..... some people predicting an actual date for the end of the world.....others like Luther in the 16th century (500 years ago) quite convinced that Christ would come in glory within his own lifetime...

The reason for this? One significant factor for Luther was the Muslim foe reaching the edges of Europe..... the Turks were approaching the gates of Vienna....it must be The End!

Yet human history has continued with times of relative calm and then times of crisis..... we might well be old enough to remember the threat of nuclear devastation hanging over us in the 70's say.....something that has come back into the frame with recent pronouncements from Russia.....

What we may also find puzzling is the words we read: Jesus telling them "this generation will not pass away until all things have taken place"

so its all going to happen now!

.....and the early Christians clearly lived in the expectation that the final days of the coming of the Kingdom were imminent.

"This generation will not pass away"

we usually take this as referring to the fall of Jerusalem and the destruction of the temple in AD 70....that is what they lived to see....

How do we make sense of it? Its coming but its already happened?

If not that in a real sense we are always facing the end? We are always living in the 'end times' ...?

For indeed the end started with the kingdom of God coming in what Jesus achieved.....John Robinson put it that....

"The end for the Christian is not the description simply of what is to take place **after** everything else. It is....what has already been inaugurated in Christ. The beginning of the End is the moment Jesus uttered a loud cry'IT IS FINISHED'

With the triumph of the cross, the finished work is already done and so we are always living in that 'in between' time.....

.....the phrase 'already/not yet' may help us.....the kingdom of God as Jesus made clear is here....among you....within you....'already'but also it is 'not yet'for we live in between his finished work ('already') and his final claiming of this world till all of it is His ('not yet')....

.....and even if there is, as now, a sense of impending doom around.....we have those great words of His to hold onto: "Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away"

...Jesus told them that whatever was happening on the global stage to 'stand up and raise your heads'yes we are rightly exercised by what people are suffering across the world, but paradoxically we can also hold onto the assurance of his words....the one does not have to exclude the other....

Advent Sunday then.....advent meaning 'coming'.....we wait expectantly.....how his final coming to complete his first coming will exactly happen we can't know....

I tend to think of my dying as the way He comes finally for me....that is our personal meeting with Christ, how he comes for us in glory, how my personal world ends...

..... I also find it a helpful picture that in the in-between / already- not yet times,advent tells us he is always coming, he is always ahead.....if you like He is there at the end of every road.... He is there coming to meet us.....

.....he comes today afresh in holy communion.....as we shall say later, in the breaking of bread 'we proclaim his death until he comes'he comes now....he is still to come....

Rabindranath Tagore, the Bengali mystic in his wonderful 'Gitanjali', (Song Offerings) gives me this beautiful poem:

"Have you not heard his silent steps?

He comes, comes, ever comes.

Every moment and every age, every day and every night he comes, comes, ever comes.

Many a song have I sung in many a mood of mind, but all their notes have always proclaimed, "He comes, comes, ever comes."

In the fragrant days of sunny April through the forest path he comes, comes, ever comes.

In the rainy gloom of July nights on the thundering chariot of clouds he comes, comes, ever comes.

In sorrow after sorrow it is his steps that press upon my heart, and it is the golden touch of his feet that makes my joy to shine.

He comes, comes, ever comes"