

The First Sunday of Advent
27-11-2022
St Cuthbert's Anglican Church – Tweed Heads

- Isaiah 2: 1-5 On the Lord's Mountain there will be Peace
- Psalms 122 In Jerusalem, The House of the Lord, there will be Peace
- Romans 13:9-14 The Commandments call us to love one another,
So let us do this in anticipation of Jesus coming again.
- Matthew 24:36-44 Jesus cautions to remain watchful.

Introduction

Today we begin our Advent Journey. Advent is a time to prepare for the celebration of Christmas when we welcome the Christ Child, and a time to prepare for when Jesus will come again.

The scripture readings we have heard today look clearly towards a Future with Hope. In the readings from Isaiah and Psalm 122 we hear of the peace to come, and in the reading from the letter to the Romans we hear that "our salvation is nearer to us now than when we became believers".

The scripture readings also speak to us about remaining watchful, and how we are to live in anticipation of this Future Hope.

I believe it is only as we first know God's Peace, that we will be enabled to live into this Future with Hope that is being prepared for us.

So let us today explore how we know God's peace, and how we can live in anticipation of the Hope to come.

Knowing God's Peace

We begin to know God's peace when we accept what Jesus has done for us. It's not just about knowing that Jesus existed 2000 years ago. It's about submitting our lives to Jesus. Last week we explored this as we celebrated "Christ the King". Once we submit and allow Jesus to be our king, then the peace that comes with it is ours.

Submitting to God is liberating. In the Alpha talks that we have been doing on Wednesdays, we were reminded that salvation is freedom. In other words, when we submit to God, we are then free to live as God intended us to live, because God's peace is within us and can no longer be taken away from us.

If we know this peace, “the peace of God which passes all understanding”, then it will be something we will want to live into. Knowing God’s peace doesn’t necessarily make for an easy life, but will make for a life of meaning and purpose.

If we first know God’s peace, then I believe we will have a desire to be preparing for the Future Hope that God has planned for us.

Advent – A time to prepare

Advent is a time of preparation, and we are preparing for the coming of Jesus in two different, but very connected ways.

Firstly, we are preparing for the celebration of Christmas, where we celebrate the birth of Jesus on the 25th of December, and secondly, we are preparing for when Jesus will come again, the timing of which is unknown and into the future.

Preparing for Christmas Day

So firstly, how are you preparing for the celebration of Christmas in a month’s time?

It’s a very clear timeframe and we have a very clear view of when it will happen. Here are some things you may be doing to prepare:-

Buying presents, organizing what food you will eat, working out who’s family you will be spending time with, cards to send, which parties to attend in the lead up, who you might visit.

For some it can be a very exhausting period, and some people are very glad when Christmas finally arrives so they can get some rest.

For others it can be very challenging. For those who may be spending the time away from family, or for those who have difficult family situations, or for those who have lost loved ones during the year, it can be a time of loneliness or difficulty, when the time which used to be filled with joy, is a reminder of things that have been lost.

Whatever place we find ourselves in, we need to consciously take the time to recall that it is the coming of God into the world as a human like us that we are preparing for. If over the whole of Advent, we intentionally take just five minutes out of every day to wonder at the audacity of God to become a human being, like us, and for us, then the day of Christmas itself will not be lost to where we went, or what we received, or how much we ate.

Now of course all these celebratory things and time with family and friends is a wonderful blessing, and it is so great that many of the traditions are continuing in our increasingly secular society, but as the old saying goes, we are to cherish and hold dear that:-

“Jesus is the reason for the Season.”

So let us take time each day of this advent season to prepare for a happy, a holy and a blessed Christmas.

Preparing for when Jesus returns

The second aspect of advent preparation is for when Jesus will return.

Today’s readings from Paul’s letter to the Romans and Matthew’s gospel remind us very clearly that Jesus will return, and we will not get any more warning than we already have now.

So how do we prepare for an event that is in the future with no known date?

It begins by knowing God’s Peace, as we spoke about at the beginning, and when we know God’s peace, we know that we are preparing for something wonderful. Today’s reading from Isaiah tells us that the peace we look forward to will be a time when swords will be turned into ploughs and spears will be made into pruning hooks. A wonderful vision of peace, one I’m sure many in our world are longing for right now.

And because the time is unknown, we can only prepare, by ensuring that each and every day we are following Jesus. We prepare by living the way that Jesus would want us to live.

We prepare by reading and living the words of the bible, we prepare by spending time in prayer with God, we prepare by spending time in worship with others to nourish our souls.

In today’s reading from Paul’s letter to the Romans we hear about living in the light and not darkness. It is great imagery for living authentic and transparent lives. I sometimes shudder when I hear the word authentic because I see it so often used to mean, “do whatever you like”.

But being authentic and transparent means living in the light we hear about today in Paul’s letter to the Romans:-

“For salvation is nearer to us now than when we became believers; ¹² the night is far gone, the day is near. Let us then lay aside the works of darkness and put on the armour of light; ¹³ let us live honourably as in the day, not in revelling and drunkenness, not in debauchery and licentiousness, not in quarrelling and jealousy. ¹⁴ Instead, put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires.”

I'm sure there are some aspects of our lives we all appreciate not being known to others, but the more we grow into our faith and hope in Jesus, the more and more we will be living in the light.

We are called to be following Jesus day by day in our lives, knowing how the bible calls us to live, not because we fear what will happen if we don't, even though we should, but because we know that we are looking forward to a wonderful Future with Hope, and we want to be thankful.

Conclusion

Advent is a period in our church calendar, set aside for us, to give us time to prepare for the celebration of Christmas.

I believe that unless we are in full submission to God, we will find it difficult to understand why we need to spend the time, and unless we really know God's peace now, we will find it difficult to understand the Future with Hope we are preparing for.

So let us intentionally plan to set aside time this Advent to prepare for the coming of the Christ Child.

Let us use the time to ponder what it means for Jesus to become like us, and for us.

And let us live our lives in the light, following Jesus, in full knowledge of the Future with Hope, that is to come.

Amen.