

**Resources on the Sunday Readings - Advent Sunday
Picture Reflection (p1), Bible Study (p2-3) and All Age Activity (p4)**

Picture Reflection – prepared by Brenda



**Waiting in the dark
Mark 13: 24-37**

In the Bible passage today Jesus speaks of coming dark days when people will be close to losing hope....he urges his first hearers, and us, to stay awake to signs that offer hope which will certainly come, though at an unexpected time.

Spend a few minutes with this unusual image....we may all see something different. How would you describe it to someone?

Reflect on events in recent history that have left people bereft or hopeless(eg 9/11, the Grenfell Towers fire, the fire that damaged Notre Dame, the Covid-19 pandemic)....there may be more personal events that come to mind that have been dark....offer them to God....

What moments of 'light in the darkness' have you personally experienced in the wake of challenging times? The message of Advent is about watching and waiting in expectation and hope...how does this message speak to us this Advent?

Bible Study

NEW TESTAMENT READING - 1 Corinthians 1:3-9

3 Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

4 I give thanks to my God always for you because of the grace of God that has been given you in Christ Jesus, ⁵for in every way you have been enriched in him, in speech and knowledge of every kind— ⁶just as the testimony of Christ has been strengthened among you— ⁷so that you are not lacking in any spiritual gift as you wait for the revealing of our Lord Jesus Christ. ⁸He will also strengthen you to the end, so that you may be blameless on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. ⁹God is faithful; by him you were called into the fellowship of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.

Paul is writing a letter to the Corinthian church which he founded, and which was growing and doing well when he left. He is responding to specific questions they have written to him about and also to reports of divisions in the church and inappropriate behaviour by some of the members.

Our reading is the beginning of the letter and Paul begins as he usually does with words of thanksgiving and praise and he points them to God, reminding them of God's grace and of all that God gives them. He is reframing their issues around the bigger picture and what wonderfully uplifting and comforting words they are. He reminds them of God's abundant generosity and the strength their faith provides, which will ensure they are blameless on the day of the Lord. Paul points here to the second coming of Christ which is an advent theme. The ultimate revealing of Jesus lies in the future and one task of the Corinthians is to wait. (The letter suggests (see 1 Cor 4:8) that some of the Corinthians felt they had already arrived at the fullness of Christian life so Paul's focus here on the future day of the Lord, of future judgement, reminds them they must not imagine they are perfected!) He writes they are not lacking in any spiritual gift and yet the rest of the letter addresses issues with the Corinthians gifts. But the question is not whether they have the gifts, but how they interpret and use them. Next in this first chapter Paul addresses divisions in the church so he ends this opening thanksgiving section reminding them they are called into the fellowship of Jesus Christ, that is what is important.

- What are your spiritual gifts? How do you use them? Which ones would you like to hone and improve? (see Romans 12:6-8 and 1 Corinthians 12:7-11 for more on what Paul says about spiritual gifts)
- Paul says, "God is faithful; by him you were called into the fellowship of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord". What do you think it means to live in the fellowship of Jesus Christ our Lord? The Corinthian Christians struggled with divisions and disagreement in the community. How does our calling into the fellowship of Christ, help us think about how we address divisions in the church and how we treat each other?
- 'He will also strengthen you to the end, so that you may be blameless on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ'. In what ways have you grown and changed as a Christian?

GOSPEL - Mark 13:24-end

24 'But in those days, after that suffering,
the sun will be darkened,

and the moon will not give its light,
²⁵ and the stars will be falling from heaven,
and the powers in the heavens will be shaken.

²⁶Then they will see "the Son of Man coming in clouds" with great power and glory. ²⁷Then he will send out the angels, and gather his elect from the four winds, from the ends of the earth to the ends of heaven.

28 'From the fig tree learn its lesson: as soon as its branch becomes tender and puts forth its leaves, you know that summer is near. ²⁹So also, when you see these things taking place, you know that he is near, at the very gates. ³⁰Truly I tell you, this generation will not pass away until all these things have taken place. ³¹Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.

32 'But about that day or hour no one knows, neither the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. ³³Beware, keep alert; for you do not know when the time will come. ³⁴It is like a man going on a journey, when he leaves home and puts his slaves in charge, each with his work, and commands the doorkeeper to be on the watch. ³⁵Therefore, keep awake—for you do not know when the master of the house will come, in the evening, or at midnight, or at cockcrow, or at dawn, ³⁶or else he may find you asleep when he comes suddenly. ³⁷And what I say to you I say to all: Keep awake.'

This reading is the end of a speech given by Jesus to a few of his closest disciples. It comes two chapters after Jesus triumphant entry into Jerusalem and shortly before the last supper. The speech is in response to the disciple's admiration of the great temple in Jerusalem. Jesus predicts its destruction and then speaks cryptically about the end times. This speech is known as the 'little apocalypse' and Jesus disciples and the early Christians would have been more familiar with this apocalyptic language than we are today. It was often used in difficult times to point people to the bigger picture, that ultimately God is in charge and will make all things right. Jesus speaks about the unpredictability and suddenness of the second coming and the importance of living prepared and ready. His words are a call to stay faithful and resilient and a promise that even if everything else is destroyed his words will not pass away.

- Mark's gospel is thought to have been written around the time of the Jewish revolt, either in the middle of it or just after the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple and this 'little apocalypse' would have felt very relevant to Mark's readers. Everything, bar Jesus' words, is potentially up for destruction. What events in recent history have left people feeling bereft or hopeless (e.g. 9/11, the Grenfell fire in London, the Covid-19 pandemic, a local tragedy)? What signs of hope are there in the wake of such challenging events?
- How do you respond to 'apocalyptic' language?
- Jesus tells us to "keep awake" (v. 37) which is the call of advent. What does this mean to you? What does 'keeping awake' look like in the church? Individually?
- In the African-American community, the term 'Stay woke' has been used since the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s to mean 'be alert to the injustices around you'. The term gained further traction following the shooting of Mike Brown in Ferguson, Missouri, in 2014, with a number of commentators urging the Black community to 'stay woke and stay angry'. What injustices should we 'stay woke and stay angry' about?

All Age Activity

Lighthouses

Make a symbol to remember that God is light in the darkness

You will need: white plastic cups, card, scissors, pens, sticky tape, clear plastic cups (that fit over the top section of the white ones), battery-operated tealights.

- Take the white plastic cup, and turn it upside down so the bottom is the top
- Cut two strips of card to the right size and wrap these around the cup. Then take the card off the cup and decorate it to represent a lighthouse with doors and windows, and write 'Keep awake' on it. Colour in the two strips of card, e.g. red, so that the lighthouse has stripes.
- Fit the card back onto the cup and tape it in position.
- Place a battery-operated tealight on top before placing a clear plastic cup over the top of the tealight, to complete the simple lighthouse.