

## Waiting well

Sermon prepared by Revd Anthony Buckley, Oxford Area Dean for Advent Sunday 29 Nov 2020  
Refs: Isaiah 64. 1 -9; 1 Corinthians 1. 3-9; Mark 13.24-end

It is a great privilege to be here at St. Peter's – I am Anthony Buckley, Area Dean, and I bring warm greetings from Oxford Deanery. Happy and blessed Advent, whenever and wherever you are watching this service.

Advent is a time of waiting. In our minds there may be the waiting for Christmas, but we are reminded that also we wait for the return of Christ. What does it mean to wait well?

And this year perhaps especially feels a time of waiting – for a new Vicar, for the end of Covid, for whatever uncertainties face us. 2020 has been a reminder that we are not in control; deep down we know that is true in usual circumstances – an illness, a move, a change of career, a quarrel, can all remind us that life is seldom very certain for very long – but 2020 has brought this home.

How do we “wait well” in times of uncertainty? Our readings give us some pointers: In the Gospel we are reminded that we do know when the Master will return, this is part of the uncertainty. We need to learn to live each day as if this is the one that matters (because it is!). We learn to take things one day at a time; perhaps it is interesting that in spiritual disciplines throughout the centuries there has been an emphasis on beginning and ending each day well.

We are reminded that we have work to do. Each one of us has been entrusted with tasks, with a calling. They may seem unspectacular or unnoticed (except to the angels) but they form our vocation. They are good tasks, says Paul in Ephesians, prepared for us to do. We are privileged to have a role to play today – and knowing this, can help with the waiting.

The Isaiah passage reminds us that we believe in a God who brings good justice. Whatever is unfair will be put right. Sometimes in our personal interactions or across society we may not feel that justice is done; we are to strive for justice, for the oppressed to be set free, but we are not to despair: one day, as C S Lewis has it said in Narnia, all will be well:

*“Wrong will be right, when Aslan comes in sight, At the sound of his roar, sorrows will be no more, When he bares his teeth, winter meets its death, And when he shakes his mane, we shall have spring again.”*

But the justice that God brings reminds us of accountability. It is not a bad thing to reflect on those areas of our lives that need sorting out, especially in Advent and Lent (but if you are like me, you need to do this all year round). There was an American President (sadly I cannot remember which one) who went home after church. His wife said: “What did the minister preach about?” “Sin.” “What did he say?” “He was against it.” In a time of waiting it is good to bring to mind our own need of forgiveness, and indeed our calling to forgive others.

And this may remind us of Paul's encouraging words in the epistle. We wait well, with assurance and hope that God will see us safely through. We are to be people of hope (and how our world needs the church to be people of hope and expectation at this time).

C S Lewis again, this time in a letter, pondering this balance of self-examination and trust in the saving work of Christ: *“I know all about the despair of overcoming chronic temptations. It is not serious provided self-offended petulance, annoyance at breaking records, impatience et cetera doesn't get the upper hand. No amount of falls will really undo us if we keep on picking ourselves up each time. We shall of course be very muddy and tattered children by the time we reach home. But the bathrooms are all ready, the towels put out, and the clean clothes are in the airing cupboard. The only fatal thing is to lose one's temper and give it up. It is when we notice the dirt that God is most present to us: it is the very sign of his presence.”*

As we wait this Advent, perhaps we can ponder what it is to be patient, to be hopeful, to take things one day at a time, to be penitent, to be fulfilling our callings as best we can, to be assured that justice will one day be done, to remember the joy of Paul's wonderful words in Romans 8 : “There is therefore no condemnation for those who are in Christ”, and that “Nothing can separate us from the love of Christ”.

Thank you again for letting me join your service today, may I finish with these words from St. Paul, and may God give us grace, individually and together, to wait well. *“If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. If I give away all I have, and if I deliver my body to be burned, but have not love, I gain nothing. Love is patient and kind; love is not jealous or boastful; it is not arrogant or rude. Love does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice at wrong, but rejoices in the right. Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never ends.”*

**Amen**