

## Sermon for Advent 1 – Sunday 29<sup>th</sup> November 2015

Jer. 33: 14-16

Ps 25: 1-9

1 Thess. 3: 9-13

Luke 21: 25-36

### Signs of the Kingdom

Last week I preached about Christ's Kingdom, and about peace, love and forgiveness being its hallmarks, the signs of the Kingdom. When we pray the Lord's prayer, we pray 'Your Kingdom come'. But today we heard in our Gospel reading Jesus' teaching that we will know when the Kingdom is near, *not* through peace, love and forgiveness, but because we will witness signs which sound – frankly- terrifying. To quote again, there will be 'Signs in the sun, the moon, and the stars, and on the earth distress among nations confused by the roaring of the sea and the waves. People will faint from fear and foreboding of what is coming upon the world.' *These*, it seems, are the signs that the Kingdom is near. Apocalyptic, destructive, catastrophic events.

And actually, rather appropriate to reflect on today - entering as we do the season of advent; more specifically against a backdrop of the Paris climate conference starting on Monday. Some of us from St Cuthbert's were at Scotland's Climate March here in Edinburgh yesterday. One observation made during the speeches was that climate change, and the resulting devastation and hunger suffered by the world's poorest, feeds into that greater and more complex web of conflict over resources, a factor in the increasing strife in the Middle East, and also therefore the refugee crisis.

Apocalyptic, destructive, catastrophic events creating fear and foreboding – now, in our present times. How do I reconcile what I preached last week with the themes brought out in this week's gospel reading which seem to have such reverberance for us in our times?

Firstly, I believe that Jesus was saying that the time for his Kingdom to be fulfilled will come just as those things seem to be at their very worst. After all, it was at the moment that Christ was crucified – that most horrific of deaths - that the possibility of new life was made real for us. Out of death, there came life. Secondly, whilst so often the darkness would appear to crowd out the light, in reality I don't believe it does. We often think of these being opposites:

Dark and light

Good and evil

Peace and war

Love and fear

But in fact they aren't of equal weight. Darkness is just the absence of light. The sun shines and creates light, but there's nothing equivalent creating dark. Light shines brighter than darkness permits gloom, and through the resurrection of Christ, good has won over evil; war cannot last; love is stronger than fear.

That is the truth of God's Kingdom. And what choices do we have as those who would live as children of light in the Kingdom? As those who pray for God's Kingdom to come? We *can* ignore those things, apocalyptic and catastrophic events, those events which threaten the security and safety of our brothers and sisters, and which should make our existence uneasy.

But as Christians, Advent, if we choose, is the time to be uneasy. In Advent seeing the signs means revealing the uncomfortable truths we face – of catastrophic climate change, of the many other injustices that people suffer. And it isn't just about what's wrong with our world. Whilst we can, for much of the time, not face up to the uneasy truth about ourselves, in Advent it is time to step beyond our place of safety and confront the reality of our own lives. To turn to Christ, as we do in our baptismal vows. To ask Christ to shine his light on to the dark stuff of our lives so that we can live freely as children of light.

At the same time as we need to face the darkness head on, despite our unease, we

need not be overwhelmed by it. 'Stand up and raise your heads, your redemption is near' proclaims Jesus. Yes, we are engaged in a spiritual battle between light and darkness. But it is one that Jesus has already won on our behalf, and as a result of which nothing good has been, or will be, lost. In the words of our Collect prayer this morning, our armour is that of light - that light of Christ which shines in the darkness, and which the darkness has never overcome.