

Preb Samantha Stayte

Advent I (B)

Isaiah 64:1-6      Ps 80:1-8      I Corinthians 1:3-9      Mark 13:24-end

In speaking and listening may God be known, who is Father, Son and Holy Spirit, Amen.

Happy New Year and all the blessings of Advent! Today I invite us all fully to reclaim this wonderful season that begins our Christian year and prepares us to celebrate with clear perspective, both Christmas and all that will unfold of Jesus' story in the year to come.

Advent reminds us of where we stand in God's story: where we have come from, what we are living now and what is still to come.

Before the self-help, career development, life coach and business improvement industries existed to fill this time of year with annual reviews and goal setting exercises, the ancient wisdom of the church offered us a time to look back, take stock and set our desires for the future Advent. The fundamental difference, and wisdom of Advent (now so often lost in the rush to celebrate Christmas) is that in the reflection, the call to be awake and watch, the pause of Advent its not about what we have done, but what God has done, not just about where we are now, but about where God is in our life, not about our self-set goals, but about the revealing of the deepest yearnings of our hearts, God-given to lead us towards being ready to meet him in the fulfilment of all things.

Through the weeks of Advent as we light the Advent wreath, we remember the story of God's people from the call of Abraham and Sarah, the looking forward of the prophets, the preparatory work of John the Baptist to the receptive obedience of Mary in whom God's Son was brought to birth, so that we might know God in person and find through him freedom to live as God wills for us. This is where we have come from, what God has done for us. The hope of those who waited for God's redemption, found in Jesus.

On this first Sunday of Advent, though, our readings strike a strident note to remind us that we still await the fulfilment of that redemption, the transformation of all things into the Kingdom of God's love. Our Holy One was, and is and is to come.

In this waiting time we experience something of the echo of our ancestors longing for God, and we share with them the need to remain faithful, to return again and again to God's guidance and forgiveness so that we can grow in the likeness of Jesus. This is why Advent was historically understood as a penitential

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season, like Lent – a purple time of being honest about ourselves and seeking God's help to be people of light: casting away the works of darkness and putting on the armour of light, as our collect says.

These weeks then invite us to give thanks for all that God has done, to fill with hope for all that God will do, and stay awake, watchful for our part in all that God is doing now.

What God has done.

What God will do.

And what our part is in what God is doing now.

I wonder if you recognise this:

We are a Christian family celebrating centuries of worship

We have a strong desire to be relevant in today's world

Our mission is to bring people of all ages to God, through sharing the love of God and the peace of Christ.

It's the mission statement of the parish, offered in the parish profile.

It celebrates:

What God has done: the centuries of worship that have gone before us

A hope for the future: a desire that the world receives the gospel

An openness to play our part in the work of God here and now: sharing the love and peace of Christ.

This is a Advent shaped mission statement – and in these weeks I hope we can explore how we can live into it more fully both in the Advent groups I am gathering, and as we reflect on the word of God through our Advent services.

Perhaps we can make this our Advent reflection in the spirit of a household, each given their own tasks, but with the overall instruction to stay awake and be watchful. The household Jesus talks of in the parable today.

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Let's pause with that story for a moment. A man is going on a long journey so he gives each of his slaves his own work, and reminds the doorkeeper to keep watch.

I wonder how the slaves feel about his departure – if this is the kind of household Jesus usually creates, with each given full dignity and knowing themselves loved by the master, perhaps there is a sense of something missing, a longing for the master's return.

I wonder how they go about their tasks – with enthusiasm and a sense of commitment to the life shared in the master's household?

I wonder what motivates their watchfulness – that yearning for the master's company? How does a deep yearning make a difference to watchfulness and activity? Not just a response to a command, but to the deepest desires of their own hearts?

Advent offers us the opportunity to discover, or rediscover, that the deepest desires of our own hearts lead us to God. Sometimes those desires need unburying – that's the casting off the works of darkness, and sometimes they need guarding – with the armour of light. The unburying and the guarding are things we can do together as a household of those helping each other stay awake. As we worship together we share in listening to the deep God-given desires of the people of God who have gone before us as we light the candles and listen to the scriptures. And perhaps too we can trust one another in Advent conversations to help each other discover where our deep desires meet the needs of the world in this place, so that together we hear God's calling to us for the coming year.

God of our past, our present and our future,

As we enter this waiting and watching of Advent, free our hearts to yearn for your ways and our minds, words and action to reveal your love and the peace of you Son our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.