

First Sunday in Advent:-

The beginning of a new Church year! A time of reflection and preparation for the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. Read the Gospel for Advent Sunday – **Mark chapter 13, verses 24 – 37**. Remember that these are the words of our Lord himself, “*words that shall not pass away*” (verse - 31 compare with Isaiah chapter 40, verse 8). They are recorded for us as a guide and a warning as we seek to live our lives for him.

Beware (verse 33) :-

Other versions say “*take heed*”. It is warning us that we should constantly ‘watch and pray’ so that we are not taken unawares by events. This is not a reason for fear, rather one of expectation. It is easy to be over-involved in ‘churchy’ things, busy keeping the show on the road; I’ve been there and done that in parish ministry! The parables following on from the parallel passage in Matthew chapter 25 are worth reading in this context.

Keep Alert – Watch (again verse 33):-

The parable of the Wise and Foolish virgins is a graphic description of this along with the parable here in Mark 13 verses 34 - 36. One can get fed up with watching and waiting. Remember studying 2 Peter chapter 3 a few weeks ago? Our worship, especially our celebration of Holy Communion should be a constant looking forward to the coming Kingdom. Read the words of the Apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians chapter 11, verse 26 “*For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes.*”

Note that “*only the Father*” knows the time of the ‘Second Coming’! There are those who try to predict the date (wrong so far!); however there are a number of pointers of which we need to aware. The “*wars and rumours of wars . . . earthquakes in various places, there will be famines;*” are “*but the beginnings of the sufferings*”. (Mark chapter 13, verses 7 – 8). Note that these events are “*but the beginnings of the sufferings*”- there is far more to come! In this passage there is the implication that there will be a general persecution of believers “*you will be hated of all for my name’s sake*” (verse 13).

Read 2 Thessalonians chapter 2, verses 1 – 17:-

This passage, like much of the Book of Revelation is somewhat obscure; however, along with the words of our Lord Jesus Christ it carries a clear warning that there will be a falling away from the truth and a lawlessness / rebellion before the Day of the Lord.

Mark chapter 13, verses 24 – 31:-

Verse 30 seems to imply that the Lord Jesus was to return in the lifetime of those listening! For a possible answer we need to re-read chapter 13, verses 1 – 4. The disciples ask what can be taken as a double question – verse 4. “*When will this be*” - i.e. ‘the destruction of the Temple’ and “*what will be the sign when all things are to be accomplished*” - i.e. ‘the Last Day’. The answer that the Lord Jesus gives is a conflation of events; the fall and destruction of the city of Jerusalem in A.D. 70; (see for example verses 14 – 18) and the Second Coming which is definitely referred to in verses 24 – 29.

Whatever our understanding of these sometimes puzzling passages of Scripture one thing is certain! We must be ready at all times to serve our Lord Jesus Christ and to welcome him when he comes in glory.

His word to us this Advent is still “*what I say to you I say to all: Watch.*”