

**Sunday 15<sup>th</sup> November**  
**2<sup>nd</sup> before Advent**

Sermon – Rev Wendy Carter

1 Thessalonians 5:1-11

Matthew 25: 14-30

Here we are 2 Sundays before Advent, in a year like no other we have known. Since March it has felt as if life is on pause. But even amongst Covid restrictions there have been things to enjoy.

A chance to enjoy our gardens or a local country walk, to rest and read or find creative pursuits, to phone friends.

More opportunity to find silence and take time to pray.

And prayer has been desperately needed.

We are reminded of so many different needs. For those who are alone and anxious, those worried about others and unable to have close contact.

For the bereaved.

For stretched and stressed medical staff, for struggling families, for those making policy decisions, the list goes on.

In this situation we face the reality that so much is outside our control; helpless we have prayed, given our fears in trust to God.

We might have reflected upon the ways humanity has ignored God and gone its own way regardless - and then perhaps a worm of anxiety may enter our minds. Do we have any grounds to expect mercy?

God is compassionate- but He is also righteous, just, almighty.

How will it feel to be frail and human in the presence of perfect love and holiness?

Today's Bible readings prepare us to enter the penitential season of Advent realising how much God loves us, despite our waywardness.

It prepares us to humbly welcome the Christ child born in Bethlehem, but it also reminds us that Jesus will come as judge of all.

Lets lighten the mood a little. How long is it since you played hide and seek with young ones?

We know how it feels when we hear the call 'coming, ready or not!' - especially if we're not ready!

Today's readings shout 'coming ready or not!'

Too late to take stock of our lives once the count has ended!  
'No one knows the day or the hour!' [Matt 24:36]

Today's Old Testament reading is about the coming great and terrible day of the Lord – a time when God will come with justice and vengeance.

Thank God we have Jesus who gave himself to save us!  
In his letter, St. Paul reminds the Christians in Thessalonica that the day of the Lord will come.

Jesus will return in glory as judge - unexpectedly 'like a thief in the night'

Jesus' return will shock most of the world half to death!  
But we are His people, and we will be awake and at work, loving and serving, ready for His return.

If Jesus has been present in our hearts and an honoured guest in our lives, we will not be terrified when it happens  
We may be hugely surprised - but anxiety will become delight as we welcome the Lord we worship when we finally meet him face to face.

Paul's letter to the Thessalonians may be the oldest part of the New Testament written only about 15 years after the Resurrection. Jesus' return was expected imminently then, but now nearly 2000 years later I would guess that most people expect to meet God when they die, rather than at the second coming.

So as a Christian community we remind ourselves every year to be ready- just in case this is the time chosen – the year 2020!  
How do we live while we are waiting?

Paul's says; Encourage one another and build each other up'  
This is something that we have become good at during this pandemic - we have cared for each other, supported each other.  
We might also encourage one another by talking about our faith; tell each other when we notice God at work around us.  
Faith, love and the hope of salvation protect us as we wait.

Christ' coming may be delayed but it will not [should not!] catch us unaware –  
The fact is built into the fabric of our Christian lives.  
We are children of light able to read the signs in hope.

Do you know C S Lewis' 'The Lion the Witch and the Wardrobe'?

Remember the faun, Mr Tumnus?

He is always waiting for Aslan's return - watching for the signs, remembering the ancient wisdom.

Expecting Spring, despite perpetual, frozen winter in Narnia.

The role of God's people is to bring hope and light to the world so that fewer and fewer are left in the dark as the kingdom of God grows.

Our Gospel reading also says 'coming ready or not'.

Jesus tells a parable about a very wealthy man who leaves three of his slaves responsible for his very considerable assets. They all know that their master will be gone a long while, they don't know when he will be back.

He knows them well, their strengths and weaknesses.

So he judges how much responsibility and opportunity to give each.

They are charged with using the master's money to the best of their ability in his absence.

A talent was not a coin but a weight of metal about 30 kg – so of gold or silver it is a great deal of money. About 100 lbs weight. One talent of silver would have provided subsistence living for 15 years

So here we have slaves entrusted with very large sums of cash.

Each is given what the master judges he can deal with, five talents to the first, two talents to the second and one talent to the third.

The first two work quickly to double their investment. When the master returns they join him in a celebratory party and are given new projects to foster !

The third slave however is so worried about taking a risk and getting it wrong that he buries the money –

Just to keep it safe from thieves.

Perhaps he cannot think how to invest it?

He knows his master will be gone for a long time, perhaps he procrastinates and puts off doing anything at first, and then as time goes by it gets forgotten.

Sadly, he shows no trust in himself.

He takes no courage from his employer's faith in him – he has been trusted with a large amount, he could make it work for him - but he can only think of keeping the money safe.

When his master returns, he gives him the exact amount and blames his master for being shrewd.

He is shut out of the celebration of homecoming.

What does it say to us?

The day will come when our master returns and asks us to produce an account.

We are all gifted with the Holy Spirit in our Baptism.

The Spirit of God grows as we make use of it.

Are we busy investing God's gift and trust in us – or are we secretly avoiding any risk of what it will do to our lives?

Are we using our talents or sitting on buried treasure?

The Spirit of God gives us joy, courage, understanding, compassion, tolerance, honesty and faith these things are what make our churches obviously different from a club or society. We fight injustice at home where we can - with the food bank, Narthex and Adavu and abroad with letter writing or appeals to our MP and so many other things folk do independently.

We are the slaves in the parable

Slaves have no belongings and no rights.

Everything we have comes from God

Everything

As we watch and wait 2000 years on, we witness that God stands at the beginning and the end of time – and to him humanity remains accountable.

Lets pray that in the grace of Jesus Christ we will be able to stand on the last day and humbly say we have done our best and produce the account sheet for God to examine, before we join with saints and angels at the heavenly celebration on the Day of the Lord!.

Amen