

Sunday 29th November 2020
Advent Sunday

Mark 13 vv 24 – 37:

*But in those days, following that distress,
“the sun will be darkened,
and the moon will not give its light,
the stars will fall from the sky,
and the heavenly bodies will be shaken.”*

At that time men will see the Son of Man coming in clouds with great power and glory. And he will send his angels and gather his elect from the four winds, from the ends of the earth to the ends of the heavens.

Now learn the lesson from the fig tree: as soon as its twigs get tender and its leaves come out, you know that summer is near, right at the door. I tell you the truth, this generation will certainly not pass away until all these things have happened. Heaven and earth will pass away but my words will never pass away.

No one knows about that day or hour, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son but only the Father. Be on guard! Be alert! You do not know when that time will come. It is like a man going away: He leaves his house and puts his servants in charge, each with his own assigned task, and tells the one at the door to keep watch.

Therefore keep watch because you do not know when the owner of the house will come back – whether in the evening or at midnight, or when the cock crows or at dawn. If he comes suddenly do not let him find you sleeping. What I say to you I say to everyone, Watch!

In a previous reflection I commented that using a lectionary had on occasion, obliged me to address matters that I find difficult or uncongenial. This is one of those occasions. I am uncomfortable with the language in which the “Last Days” or “The Day of the Lord” is expressed.

Chapter 13 of Mark is the most difficult part of the Gospel for the modern mind to understand. For one thing, it was written in a world that was in many ways totally different from our own. In the 1st Century no one had ever travelled more than 15 mph – the speed of a fast camel, the concept of flying at 40,000ft or seeing and talking to someone 12,000 miles away, both of which we take for granted, was quite alien. For another it uses the language of poetry, dreams and visions that we cannot relate to.

We may well see the “Wars, earthquakes, natural disasters” as something that has happened many times over hundreds of years – while for Jewish readers they would readily call to mind the history of Judea in the middle of the 1st Century.

What, then is this passage saying to us 2000 years later, in a totally different world? It tells us that only the person close to God can see the secrets of history and enter into something of the plan of God.

It tells us about the doctrine of the Second Coming – and we must remember that the imagery in which it is clothed is the imagery of Jesus' own time – to speculate is useless, when Jesus himself was content not to know. The one thing we can be sure of is that history is going somewhere. There is consummation to come.

It tells us that of all things, to forget God and to become immersed in the earth is foolish.

The wise persons never forgets to be ready when the summons comes. To live with this means that the end will not be terror but eternal joy.

Let us pray:

We praise you, Lord Christ, that in your infinite love you came to save us from the power of sin and bring us to God.

We praise you that you come to us now in the power of your spirit to strengthen us for service and to live with us all our days.

Help us to remember that you will come again in majesty to be our judge, that we may dedicate our lives to the furtherance of your kingdom.

We ask this for the honour and glory of your name.

Make clear to us, O Lord our God,
the meaning of Christ's coming
to Bethlehem long ago,
in our lives now
and at the last great day;
that we may receive his forgiveness,
know the power of his living presence,
and rejoice in the hope of his kingdom;
for his name's sake.

Amen