

Second Coming

11 8 13

O God, you declare your mighty power
most chiefly in showing mercy and pity:
mercifully grant to us such a measure of your grace
that we, running the way of your commandments,
may receive your gracious promises,
and be made partakers of your heavenly treasure.

Our text may be found in Luke chapter 12 and verse 40:

**'you also must be ready
for the Son of Man is coming at an unexpected hour.'**

Every week we say the Creed. Every week, familiar words trip off our tongues as we repeat a summary of what we as Christians believe to be the principal articles of our faith. Repetition breeds familiarity and familiarity, as you know, breeds CONTENT ! But have you heard and taken on board everything that we as Christians ascribe to ? The phrase I want to draw your attention to is suggested by our text today - **'He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead.'**

The idea of the end times, of Christ coming again as judge and king, is part and parcel of what we look forward to as the Kingdom of God is fully realised on earth. What began with the Incarnation; what was effected by the Crucifixion; what was opened to us by the Resurrection; what was confirmed to us by the Ascension -

the possibility of a real and loving relationship between God our Father and us his children – is brought to a climax, a conclusion, by his Second Coming.

Now, as Christians living at the turn of the twenty-first century, we might be forgiven for not majoring on the notion of the Second Coming. We are too busy with, preoccupied with, the present. It's now over two millennia since the birth of Christ and the end of things understandably don't seem to be a practical possibility at present. When things are going well – and this summer is proving particularly sunny – why would we want to be gloomy ?

But interestingly, there has always been strands in Christianity, Millenarianism for example, that have cheerfully proclaimed 'the end is nigh'. I remember cartoon jokes from my childhood of a bearded man in sandals with billboard standing on a street corner proclaiming 'the end is nigh' while life went on busily around him. Jehovah Witnesses used to major on the idea but their predictions of when it will happen have come and gone. Adventists, who unlike the JWs are Christians, also have the idea of the Second Coming as a major plank of their belief.

And the idea of the Second Coming is a Christian belief which is, as I indicated at the start, embodied, enshrined, in our Creed. And today's two parables could be read as teaching on the subject: one about a Master returning from a wedding banquet; the other about a thief in the night.

The first doesn't quite work for me because the culture and situation is so far removed from my life experience. A household with servants (I should be so

lucky!) – and in this case servants who are slaves, people literally and legally owned by their Master – is centuries out-of-date in our Western culture though some folk nowadays may be in fact be wage slaves – possibly on zero hour contracts ! And these servants are supposed to wait up for their master's return, late at night from a wedding banquet. Interestingly, a wedding banquet is used by Jesus in other parables as an image of, or coded language for, the coming of the Messiah. The tone is admonitory – warning us to be awake, alert, ready and waiting. What is curious is the reward that is promised – that the master will reward his faithful, attentive servants by inviting them to sit down and eat while he waits on them !

I like the second – ‘The thief in the night’ – because it could happen to anyone. It's succinct – it doesn't waste any words: if only the householder had known when the thief would try to break in, then he could have protected his property. Short, sweet and perfectly to the point.

So where do we stand as Christians with regards to the Second Coming ? Yes, it is a fact. Yes, it is an article of faith but no, we simply can't know when it is likely to happen. So perhaps, understandably for us, the Second Coming remains something that is on the back burner. But are we correct in being so complacent ? With a financial crisis that we can't quite seem to shake; with the possibility of global warming and climate change; with wars and rumours of wars; with earthquakes and tsunamis; with the threat of nuclear accidents and the threat of terrorism; is the world we know and love in fact entering the end times ?

I don't know nor can we know but perhaps the message of today's two parables is simply we should adopt the Scout motto and 'Be prepared' !

I have spoken in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,
Amen.

Preached at the Eucharist

St Bartholomew's, Dinard

11th August, 2013

G: Sermons 28 : Second Coming

