

## Looking back – looking forward

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Almighty God,  
give us grace to cast away the works of darkness  
and to put on the armour of light,  
now in the time of this mortal life,  
in which your Son Jesus Christ  
came to us in great humility;  
that on the last day,  
when he will come again in glorious majesty  
to judge the living and the dead,  
we may rise to the life immortal.

Our text this morning is from the Book of Revelation, chapter 1 and verse 8:

**'I am the Alpha and the Omega, says the Lord God.'**

This year, St Andrew's Day falls on Advent Sunday. Advent marks the beginning of the Christian Year so perhaps the coming year may have a distinctly Scottish flavour ? It seems odd to think that our liturgical year can begin before December, but the four Sundays in the run up to Christmas which starts today, gives us the opportunity both to look forward and to look back.

We are, of course, looking forward to Christmas ! Who wouldn't unless the thought of the work involved is already weighing you down ? If we are looking

forward to Christmas, then there is also a very real sense that we are looking back too. Not only are we looking forward at what is to come but we are looking back on a real moment in time, a real event in history over 2 millennia ago when Jesus was born in a stable of an inn in Bethlehem and the Son of God took flesh in the form of a Jewish baby boy and our salvation history took a distinct turn for the best.

But Advent looks forward and back not only to the birth of Christ but it also looks forward to his coming 'again in glory to judge both the quick and the dead'. Advent reminds us of Christ's Second Coming and it is his Second Coming that I should like us to look at today.

Our gospel passage from Mark paints a pretty dramatic, a pretty scary picture of the End Times:

'But in those days, after that suffering  
the sun will be darkened  
and the moon will not give its light  
and the stars will be falling from heaven  
and the powers in the heavens will be shaken.

Then they will see "the Son of Man coming in clouds" with great power and glory. Then he will send out his angels, and gather into his elect from the four winds from the ends of the earth to the ends of heaven.'

What is being depicted in Mark's apocalyptic vision of the End Times is a series of natural disasters on an astronomical scale which will herald the Second Coming.

Using the example of the fig tree in blossom, Mark is simply saying that you know what time it is by what is happening around you. If the fig tree is in bloom, then summer is coming. If there is perturbation in the heavens, then Jesus is coming.

Essentially, the thought of Christ coming back as judge, to judge us, is pretty scary. The question is will we be found wanting or be good enough? To be honest, I'm an optimist so I'd like to think that we will hear that great phrase of approbation on which I preached a couple of weeks ago – 'Well done good and faithful servant' (Matt 25 v21). To be honest, I know my faults better than I know yours but I hope and trust our heart is in the right place, that we will have tried our best to do our best. I Trust that it is God's grace, the love he shows each one of us through the birth, life, death and resurrection of his Son, Jesus Christ our friend and saviour that will render us acceptable and justified in his sight. It's not so much what we have done but our acceptance of his love and our response his love by our trying to love others.

Let me end today's sermon with the parable with which Mark ends today's gospel passage – that parable of a householder going away on a journey and leaving his servants in charge. None of his servants knows when their master will return so it is up to every one of them to be alert to the possibility of his imminent return unannounced. And so, too, it's up to us to stay awake like them!

Let me end with the thought that Christmas is coming in four weeks time – in 25 days. The Second Coming too will come one day and the best and wisest among us know not how soon or when. As for us, we should stay alert, awake to the

possibility of it happening but not frightened or terrified but in good heart, confident that our Lord loves us his children.

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*

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G: Sermons 31 : Looking

