

Advent 1

By God's Grace may I speak in the name of the God who was and is and is to come. Amen.

Today Advent begins. The season of mince pies, hot chocolate, mulled wine, crackling fires, Christmas music and all sorts of cosiness. Or, if you're in church, the time for bible readings that speak of doom and gloom, reminding us to stay alert as we wait for the coming of Jesus Christ.

Maybe we are a bit upside-down in the church. Or maybe the world in general is a bit upside down. Or maybe even both. Is it time for cosiness or doom and gloom? Where is up and where is down? Maybe we simply live in an upside-down world, within and outside the church.

In the world we live in, things aren't the way they should be, they are all upside-down. There are those who have more than enough, but are always scared that it won't be enough. There are people who do not have enough of anything, food, warmth, a safe home or health care. There are wars fought for power and resources. People are being killed senselessly and without restraint, people are forced to leave their homes. As refugees in other countries, it is made abundantly clear to them that they are unwanted and considered less human than those already there. The richest countries of the world have been recklessly squandering away the resources of this planet for a couple centuries, which now has the whole of creation groaning and the poorest countries paying the highest price for our recklessness.

Then there are the upside-down aspects in our own lives, the ways we fall short of loving God and our neighbours. The brokenness and pain we experience in our own bodies, hearts and minds. A broken world.

And deep down I think we can hear a voice crying out: “This is not right; this is not how the world should be. This is all upside-down!”

So how does God fit into all this? Advent is a time of waiting. Waiting for God. But what kind of God are we waiting for? In our first reading today, Jeremiah speaks about a righteous branch that will spring up for David. He speaks of a Saviour who will execute justice and righteousness. That is the God we are waiting for. Yet, that God comes to us differently than we might expect, in an upside-down kind of way.

The rulers of the world we are used to, make decisions for us from seats of power. Some make them with our best interests at heart, others for selfish reasons. Sometimes their decisions and actions are good and just and sometimes they are not. Based on our experience with earthly rulers, we would expect God to come into the world majestically, demonstrating beyond the shadow of a doubt that God is in charge, stronger and more powerful than any earthly ruler. That god would swiftly sort out all the messiness of this upside-down world.

Instead, God enters our world in the womb of an unmarried teenage girl, who lives under Roman occupation. It’s all upside-down. A God who comes from on high, entering the utterly vulnerable and dependent experience of a baby in the womb. An infant, who depends for his sheer survival, on his mother.

And yet, this utterly dependant baby, growing in Mary’s womb is the light of the world. The hope we are desperately waiting and longing for. A God who doesn’t despise us for our vulnerability and need, but who enters that same vulnerability and need with us. A God who doesn’t fight violence with more violence, threats with greater threats or brutality with more brutality. A God who embraces human vulnerability. God enters our experiences, showing us unending love and an abundance of grace. Teaching us a different way of being with each

other. Bringing healing and hope into this hurting world, into our hurting lives, with gentleness.

In our very doom and gloom gospel reading today, Jesus reminds his listeners to be on guard and alert within an upside-down world. To not simply give up in the face of injustice, greed and violence. Instead, Jesus calls all who are willing to listen to pray and try and live in a way that honours the upside-down God. The God who came to us as a vulnerable and needy infant, to break the vicious cycle of injustice, greed and violence. The God who was and is and is to come, the God for who's coming again we are still waiting.

What might tell us this upside-down God about our world and ourselves? How might we prepare for the coming of this upside-down God into our upside-down world? How might we wait, anticipate and prepare for the birth of Mary's baby over the next few weeks?

Amen