

**HOMILY GIVEN BY THE VERY REVEREND ANDREW NUNN,
DEAN OF SOUTHWARK CATHEDRAL – Advent Sunday 2020**

The leaves have turned into their autumnal colours and then fallen. Bare branches now remain. We began these lockdowns in the spring, now we're heading fast to winter; we began as new life was beckoning, we're now in the time of dark nights and the mists and mellow fruitfulness have become cold and frosty mornings.

But today is our day of new beginnings, our day of eager anticipation. Today is not an ending but a beginning. Advent Sunday is wonderful and whilst this week we can't be together at the Eucharist watching as someone tentatively lights the first candle on the Advent Crown, as a sign to us that Jesus is coming, yet we can light that candle in our homes, we can make that expectation bright and real.



Jesus talks of the fig tree, bare, looking dead. The rich leaves had fallen. The juicy, sweet, voluptuous fruit had gone. The tree stands hard, bare, empty. But he points to it and says

'From the fig tree learn its lesson: as soon as its branch becomes tender and puts forth its leaves, you know that summer is near.' (Mark 13.28)

We must learn the lesson of the fig tree, that the hard branch will become tender.

REPORT THIS AD

The poet Sylvia Plath listened to this lesson from Jesus and then she wrote

"I saw my life branching out before me like the green fig tree in the story. From the tip of every branch, like a fat purple fig, a wonderful future beckoned and winked."

I'm not so much looking forward to Christmas this year – though of course, deep down, I am – but I am looking forward to the New Year. I don't know about you but I can't wait to shake

the dust of 2020 off my feet and step into a new year, knowing that it will be a year of grace and new possibilities.

I won't weep for the year that's past but I will weep for all that we've lost, the thousands of people who've died in this country, the well over a million who have died around the world. I will weep for lives broken, jobs lost, communities devastated. I will weep for cancelled plans, lost opportunities, weep for the stress and the fear and the anxiety that we have suffered. I will weep in thanksgiving for those who've worked to keep me safe, worked to tend the needs of the sick, weep for the feeders and the carers and the key workers of every kind who've given themselves and more than themselves.

But I want to learn the lesson of the fig tree, I need to learn the lesson of the fig tree. I look for the hard branches becoming tender and that wonderful future beckoning and winking, to use Sylvia Plath's beautiful, evocative language.

The Jesus who I await, the Jesus we await, is the Jesus who will become the fruit of that tender tree, whose branch-like arms will stretch out to embrace me who long for embrace, whose sweetness will feed me who need to feed, whose blood will wash me who long for true cleansing, who will touch me as I am unable to be touched.

Jesus, bread and wine, body and blood, single light shining in the darkness, crucified, risen, awaited – this is the Advent Christ who meets us today and leads us into a tender, fruitful tomorrow.

Jesus, tender shoot, strong branch, life-giving fruit of the bare tree, sustain me, support me, hold me, feed me. Amen.