

Revd Michael Burns
Christ Church West Wimbledon
Sermon : Advent Sunday
Sunday 27th November 2022

ADVENT SUNDAY 2022
Preached by Michael Burns

As you may imagine, in common with many Christians, both clergy and laity alike, I have long been appreciative of the variety of the church year – a year which starts again today. On Advent Sunday, the Church begins its new year with the alarm clock going off very loudly to wake us out of sleep. Everything about the Advent season gives us a sense of urgency and is a season that I particularly love with its rich music and its solemn readings. In the Gospel we have Jesus' own teaching about the last days, and discover that one the thing we can be certain of is that the second coming cannot be predicted with any certainty. In other words, we have to live our lives in constant readiness – 'keep awake' – so as not to be taken by surprise. It is about treating each day as really precious and valuable, living it to the full, not wasting time but being optimistic and full of hope. If we could learn by the grace of God to trust him, then we may find our lives becoming that much richer and freer because of what we are able to come to terms with while we are still here on this earth.

So, this morning the Church family meets as usual to worship and to prepare ourselves in this Advent season for the coming of our Lord – as well as preparing ourselves to celebrate his birth in exactly four weeks' time. So do enjoy mingling, chatting and spending your money at our Advent Fair as part of this Advent season!

The theme of Advent is one of hope and promise of the kingdom that is to come. May it be possible for each one of us to trust God that we will have the courage to accept whatever lies ahead for each one of us because then we will be truly free through the grace of the God of life and hope to live.

But on the other hand if we are fearful and afraid and anxious I would encourage us to cling onto the best known saying of one of the most famous women who lived in Norwich. No, I don't mean St Delia Smith – but the 14th century mystic Julian of Norwich. She regarded herself as a simple, unlettered person, who was not a nun but an anchoress, a person called to a solitary life, but one who is not cut-off from the world, but one anchored in it. Her life was one of prayer, contemplation and counselling, a life highly thought of by people of the time. Her home was a small cell, attached to the Church, which had three windows that opened; one into the Church, so she could hear Mass and receive Communion; one to communicate with her servant, who looked after her; and one to give advice to those who sought it.

After receiving a series of visions from God, she wrote the first book to be written in English by a woman – the Revelations of Divine Love. The subject of The Revelations is love - God's love for all humanity shown in the suffering and death of Jesus Christ, and the response of humanity towards God. She writes that this love creates all that exists; it sustains all and redeems all; it is unfailing even in times of sorrow or trial; in this love there is no place for anger; it is unconditional; it is all powerful and all embracing. God's whole purpose is to bring all into the bliss of heaven, so that “All shall be well, and all shall be well, and all manner of thing shall be well”. This very well-known phrase was claimed by Julian to be said to her by God Himself, and reflects her theology. It is one of the great sayings and gives great comfort to many: “All shall be well”.

And it is simply this phrase that I want us all to remember from this morning. Some of what the world faced in New Testament times, which continued on into Mother Julian's 14th century are the same issues which we still face today – a world in turmoil, a church at loggerheads. But God says to us “All shall be well”.

As we enter the wonderful season of Advent, a month of frenetic activity and work for us all, let us each take time, make time to stop and pause and say quietly to ourselves “All shall be well” – and try hard to believe in what we say. Amen