

People have shared with us this morning that:

Advent is a time for waiting

Advent is a time for getting ready

...

And I told you this morning that:

Advent is a time for calm.

...

Is that something you can believe? Does there seem any space for calm as the Christmas preparations clash with work and school deadlines, and the shorter, colder days, and the fact that many of you will be travelling soon?

Does there seem any space for calm as the news, and our own families and friends, tell of wars, growing extremism, intolerance, suffering due to climate change, horrific abuse cases, instability in much of what we've always taken for granted?

Does there even seem any space for calm in church, as the children rehearse the Nativity play, the choir prepares for evensong and the carol service, and as the readings speak of strange events and echo the news of distress among the nations?

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Well, as we said this morning we don't come into worship to cut ourselves off from the world. We come to re-draw that connection which we may feel we've lost during the week – to re-draw that connection between God, ourselves, and the world.

We're here to reconnect the threads between God, the world, and ourselves. Think on about these threads. God is our loving Father, who promises he will never leave us and forsake us. We may feel we let go of those threads of connection in the rush of a very secular week, but at the other end of the thread, God is holding onto you in love.

...

In his sermon last week, Geoff reminded us how we only see what is within our range of vision. He spoke about being in the orchestra, and barely knowing what's happening on the stage behind him, simply hearing the 'oohs and ahhs' and clapping of the audience, as a guide to what was going on. In Advent we get a lot of readings from Bible books like Daniel and Revelation, as well as these words of Jesus, which point to things we don't usually see. They use picture language to draw our attention to how God is at work in the events we are seeing. The events of the world are in our range of vision. But it takes a different perspective to see how God is at work.

This is the example I like. Geoff likes musicals, I like fabric! If you look at the front of woven fabric, like this pretty Jacquard weave, you can see a picture.



How on earth that picture is made, how on earth things come together, is a bit of a mystery, looking at it from the front.

How did the designer and the weaver make that picture come about?

Turn it round, look at it from the other side.



Here are the threads! Here are the connections! Here is how the designer and the weaver made it all work! The threads are there, and the threads are connected, but if my range of vision only includes the front, I can't tell what's happening, and I can't see how it all works.

...

I'm drawing very heavily, as I speak about God's work which we can't see, from Geoff's sermon last Sunday. I hope some of you remember it to, because it was never written down, and we can't find a copy of it on the website. He had a different sermon planned but he felt God was calling him to speak to us about how we look at the world, in its distress and confusion, and say 'Your kingdom come, your will be done' as we pray for people and places in the news.

I'd like you to have a think about how that phrase from the Lord's prayer works in the other languages you speak, please. If anyone's prepared to say 'Your kingdom come, your will be done' in their home language, it would be good to hear it now.

Your kingdom come, your will be done... que ton règne vienne, que ta volonté soit faite sur la terre comme au ciel.

Your kingdom come, your will be done...

...

Can I come back to some of you, later in this talk, to say those words again, please? It might get a bit emotionally raw, if you don't feel you can do it, feel free to shake your head and I'll find someone else.

...

So Geoff asked us last week, could we just do one thing. Could we, when we've read the newspaper, pray the Lord's prayer. Let's try it now, with some of this week's headlines.

Syrian troops withdraw from Aleppo as rebels advance. 🗣️ Your kingdom come, your will be done.

Russian troops are hammering Ukrainian power plants. 🗣️ Your kingdom come, your will be done.

Israeli strikes kill dozens in Gaza, Egypt to host Hamas leaders for ceasefire talks. 🗣️ Your kingdom come, your will be done.

Sweden asks China to co-operate over severed communications cables. 🗣️ Your kingdom come, your will be done.

Doctors hail a breakthrough in asthma medication . 🗣️ Your kingdom come, your will be done.

Former employee tells of sexual misconduct at Luxembourg sauna. 🗣️ Your kingdom come, your will be done.

Ecologists Preparing to Return Tigers to Kazakhstan in World-First Tiger Reintroduction Effort. 🗣️ Your kingdom come, your will be done.

Bankruptcy means curtains for steel factory in Luxembourg. 🗣️ Your kingdom come, your will be done.

Deadly diseases sweep in after hurricanes. 🗣️ Your kingdom come, your will be done.

City of Rotterdam returns Indonesian objects stolen during the colonial era. 🗣️ Your kingdom come, your will be done.

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Your kingdom come, your will be done. Do you think Geoff is onto something? Does this experience, does your experience in prayer, show you that when we shine God's light onto the news of our time, our range of vision widens?..

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Our readings today are snapshots of two sides of this coin, two sides of this hoping and trusting in God. Sarah read to us from Jeremiah, a good Advent reading, where God promises that a new leader is coming, and this leader will bring justice and righteousness. As Christians we believe that leader came in Jesus. Light of the world, God of love, of righteousness and justice. A promise fulfilled. A promise made during a shadowy time of violence, sin and desolation, a promise of new hope for the people God loves.

Do you feel the need for God's restoration, for God's righteousness, for God's justice, in the world today? Your kingdom come, your will be done.

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Becky read to us those very difficult words of Jesus, where he uses picture language and parables to talk about coming violence. The sun, moon and stars are often picture language for talking about nations and political powers. Those powers, Jesus warned, would be threatened. He told a parable about watching for the warning signs: when you see the fig tree is growing leaves, you know summer is coming.

To those people listening to Jesus, the warning signs were that Rome would destroy the temple and scatter the Jewish people from the land. This happened, in AD70. To us, as we hear Jesus' words and think of disasters and fears in our own time, it worries us, I'm sure. It's easy to miss Jesus' words of encouragement among all the fearful words of this reading. But remember he is the God of love and the Prince of Peace, and hear that as he says:

"Now when these things begin to take place, stand up and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near."

If I can paraphrase it a little:

"Now when you see these headlines, stand up and pray: 'Your kingdom come, your will be done'"

Jesus says it again, warning the people of his time to 'be on their guard', so their 'hearts are not weighed down', either with unhealthy coping strategies (that's a reasonable modern way of saying dissipation and drunkenness) or with 'the worries of this life'. So I'll paraphrase again:

'Now, when you see these headlines, don't hide your head in the sand or dissolve into anxiety, stand up and pray: 'Your kingdom come, your will be done.'

...

When we look at the news, when we look at events in our own lives, it's like looking at the front of that woven fabric. Jesus urges us to look at more than the superficial. See the signs, he says. God is at work! Be on guard! Stand up and raise your heads, and pray: 'Your kingdom come, your will be done.'

How do we keep hold of those threads this coming week? These threads which connect us, our loving Lord Jesus, and the world he created?

...

Let's bow our heads and pray:

Jesus, we look at the events of 2024 and we are disturbed, alarmed, and we see the world coping in some unhealthy ways. Turn the picture around for us, we pray, so that as we pray for the world we see you at work in it. We pray together, and we commit to praying over the week, Your kingdom come, your will be done'.

Amen