

Isaiah 2.1-5; Romans 13.11-14; Matthew 24.36-44

In Narnia, time travels at a different pace. When Lucy pushes past the fur coats and steps through the wardrobe for the first time, she has a whole adventure involving tea with a talking Faun in the strange wintry land before she goes back home. But on her return, she quickly realises that for her siblings, time had barely moved at all. They are still playing the same game of hide and seek that had begun with her going into the wardrobe. The two worlds are on a different schedule, travelling at different speeds.

Now Advent is one of my favourite times of the Church year. I love the thrill of anticipation, the excited waiting, the countdowns and looking forward. But today, as always on this first Sunday of Advent, the timing feels a bit weird. It feels a bit like we've stepped through a wardrobe and entered a place where things aren't going quite at the same pace. In this morning's readings, instead of focusing on the coming of a baby, we are looking much further ahead to the end times; we are being reminded of the big picture in the arc of God's story among us.

We begin by looking to the end of the story. In Advent there will be a sense of a dramatic conclusion of all things. The tone of preparing for the Messiah is firmly future orientated. It's the splendid ending of a story, the 'once upon a time'.

And the reason for this is that in this season of Advent, beginning with the contemplating the second coming of the work of Jesus' first coming is not complete. Yes, we are waiting, but we are waiting for something more. We wait for the church to reach its ending. What we are waiting for, church, is an embodiment of the kingdom, anticipating the day when we are drawn into fullness with God.

So our gospel reading today is a mix of certainty - that the story is coming to an end - and uncertainty - the not knowing the 'how'. Jesus is tantalisingly close, but he gives in this passage, and

the knowledge that we have no idea when things will come to an end or what that will look like. We have no idea of when we will be fully united with God and made new in Christ. So we find ourselves asked to live in limbo. We are called to dwell in uncertainty.

But uncertainty goes hand in hand with hope. In the Narnia books which come after *The Lion the Witch and the Wardrobe*, the Pevensie children are never sure how much time will have passed in Narnia when they are able to return. They live their lives in anticipation of being there once again, but never sure of when they will find their way or what age it will be there when they do. They live in uncertainty, but also in hope. In one exchange between Aslan and Lucy, the great lion says ““Do not look sad. We shall meet soon again.” and Lucy asks, "what do you call soon?" "I call all times soon" said Aslan.”

The reuniting will happen, for Lucy and for us, so it must always be expected, but we live in the waiting period on the way.

This is why we celebrate Advent every year, and why every year Advent always starts with a gospel reading that looks ahead to Jesus' second coming. We begin the church year with anticipation of where we are

headed, before we turn our hearts to God among us wrapped in the mystery of newborn.

This sense of two times, of presence and remembrance, is born in the Eucharist. For even though in our liturgical words every week 'do this in remembrance of me' we are not only recalling the past, but also doing, as we break bread and drink wine, enacting the great feast of the Kingdom.

In the Eucharist, we prepare for the future by celebrating with God for the present. It is a small taster, a glimpse, a keyhole of what it will be like when all is made new. Our liturgical celebration of the Eucharist is the soul of the wholeness and unity of the Church, drawing together in one body, a model to the world, and to the world like when all is made new. We are drawn into God's kingdom of love.

Advent anticipation is what we are looking for, not just a harkening back to the past, but remembering of times gone

enactment of the world's promised future in Christ. What we do is a powerful statement of what we believe is coming, what we are waiting for. So in response to our advent times, we witness through our faith to the things we believe are of God - we witness to love, peace, joy, abundance, the gathering of the beloved from all walks of life, together into the light of Christ.

The church is already living and will continue to live in the turning of the ages, in the strange place on both sides of the wardrobe where we are both now and then, past and future, both waiting and hope. Our task, this advent season, is to embody the excitement, the expectation, the surety of God's promise, as we live in faithful discipleship while we await, with bated breath, the birth of Christ among us on a starry joy-filled night.

Amen.