

Advent Year C

Gospel Reflections

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Advent Week 1

Luke 21: 25-28, 34-36

The Gospel of Return.

Rather than being a frightening promise of disaster (apocalyptic imagery) in the Final end time (eschatological imagery), surely this Advent introduction of the universe-changing RETURN of the Christ should bring hope, joy and a certitude that fulfilment is coming. This Gospel passage is indeed an inspiration to us to “stand up and raise our heads” and not be “weighed down by the worries/cares of life”.

Return means to turn back, to come around again, to be where one has been. In the midst of the chaos/harmony of created existence, where sin and death are in tension with love and life, the Word of God, Jesus, in an ongoing return brings to the universe, the fulfilment towards which it has been heading since the explosion of love that created us. We will return, “all who live on the face of the earth”, with the Glorious Christ, to where we came from, to where we have always been heading.

What does this Advent Gospel mean for my daily living?

In the tension and rush of everyday life, there are times when we look for a return to some secure place, to a foundational identity where we find our true selves, our essential ‘us’. We can ache for moments when we are able to feel and see ourselves clearly, simply, peacefully. We return, as it were, to that birth state where our oneness with God, our joy in being alive, stabilises us and makes sense of living, in an otherwise difficult world. At these times, we experience the return of Christ into our being, as we let go of fear and guilt and are assured that we are precious and whole.

And so we pray:

Advent God,
whilst you are faithfully and continually with us,
we are often unaware of your existence within us.
May your Spirit stir within us a recognition of this reality,
so we know in confidence that we journey with you
and will return to you.
We ask this through Christ, who will come, will remain and will return.
Amen.

Advent Week 2 Luke 3:1-6

The Gospel of Restore

We continue our Advent journey and are challenged to RESTORE the righteousness of God. In the first 2 verses, the brokenness of the world is highlighted by the scripture writer with details of the rule of sin: the Roman pagan rulers, Tiberias and Pilate, the traitorous and venal Jewish royals Herod and Philip, along with the temple priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas, with its oppressive legalism.

Then, this reign of fear and terror is clawed back with the insertion into the story of a descendent of a righteous member of the temple priestly tribe, John, son of Zechariah. John points to a restoration. Through our change of heart and mind and deeds, we are to restore the valleys into plains, the mountains into lowland, the rough ground to smoothness and the ignorant to experience the reality of God saving power. Surely yes, the Lord is coming who will accomplish this restoration of the barren into the productive, the torturous into peace, the rule of slavery into freedom, but it's up to "all in the region" to prepare for this.

What does this Advent Gospel mean for my daily living?

Restorative justice is spoken about as a positive and creative approach to dealing with criminal behaviour. Rather than punish, adding brokenness to brokenness, restoring is about healing, hope-making and fruitfulness. God's justice is eternally restorative. How do we act like the God who restores? How do we restore the peace our family will thrive on, restore the security the refugee and impoverished are desperate to reach, and restore to integrity and blessing our dealings in our work and finance?

And so we pray:

Advent God,
in the coming of your Jesus
we have the promise of the restoration
of your rule of peace and justice.
May the hope that this reality grows in us,
strengthen us to be preparers and agents of your Ways.
We ask this through Christ, who has made all, who sees the broken, and who will
restore wholeness to all.
Amen.

Advent Week 3

Luke 3:10-18

The Gospel of Remove

Three groups of people are stirred by John to ask for a way forward. In his answer he challenges them to REMOVE from their daily lives, impediments to justice for others and to then re-move their lives to become agents of God's love. The locals, crowded around him, must remove that extra coat and give it, must share the food at their table, removing their "right" to it all. The Tax collectors must remove from their lives habits of greed and theft and treat all with fairness. The soldiers are to remove violence and threats from the practice of their authority and power and live in compassion with others. What group do we belong to? Surely, we know in our hearts that we can have been called crowd, tax collector, soldier!

We who are baptised in water and the Spirit need to take the winnowing fork in our hands. The wheat of justice is on our barn floor. Our work is to remove the sweet grain from the stalk, remove it to make bread and remove from the floor, the chaff of our selfishness, our disinterest, our false words and the anger that has no place in God's storeroom.

What does this Advent Gospel mean for my daily living?

Moving is a common Australian experience. "Coastal Removals" hurl with their containers up and down between the fringe cities and perhaps look slightly incongruous when their contract takes them out to regional cities and bush towns. No one really enjoys removal times but the pain is usually followed by gain, in a new job, a better house, or perhaps a chance to move from a trauma situation to a new start. How does the idea of packing up and starting afresh strike us in building liberating relationships, in becoming sensitive to others suffering, in chucking out the "me only" baggage?

And so we pray:

Advent God,
you make all things anew
and have buried in our hearts a desire for freedom and fulfilment.
May we act on these promptings
and remove from our lives the old habits and attitudes
that keep us stuck in indifference and fear.
We ask this through Christ, who challenges, who affirms, who trusts.
Amen.

Advent Week 4 Luke 1: 39-45

The Gospel of Reveal

Exquisite in its imagery of a miracle of the essentials of human life-conception, pregnancy, anticipation and deep loving relationships, this passage REVEALS the vision of the God who is about to be birthed into human history. It's a vision of flesh as holy, connection to each other as fundamental and the future of ecstatic fullness of life.

What is revealed to Elizabeth when she hears Mary say "hello"? First, she experiences the great joy of any mother when the child inside her moves. Her son, to be named John, makes himself felt as a stirrer and action man, already filled with the Spirit. Secondly, Elizabeth, revelling in her own pregnancy, discovers her visitor is similarly blessed. And then, amidst the excitement and joy, Elizabeth is stunned by her enlightened understanding that her cousin is carrying "my Lord", our Lord, in her womb. And, again, her womb-child leaps in joy.

Her final words reveal a message for all of us, a deeper and universal truth. We will be full of joy and blessed as we take to our heart in belief that God will fulfil in us and for us, the promise of the Covenant.

What does this Advent Gospel mean for my daily living?

"All will be revealed" is the mystery writers' claim; and we do have a deep urge to have matters made clear, answers given, certainty revealed. How do we follow up on this natural instinct as we go about the daily business of human living? It could be that we, like Elizabeth, need an openness to the surprise and even the discomfort of something really new landing upon us, an awareness that many things in our lives were unsatisfactory, unnecessary, unfulfilling and that in reaching out in contact and true empathy to others, we have joy and hope revealed.

And so we pray:

Advent God,
your compassion and love for creation is revealed
in your Word taking flesh in the womb of Mary.
May we join with her and be revealers to a suffering world,
of what you have planned for us,
a Creation where Love reigns and human hopes are fulfilled.
We ask this through Christ, whose time is coming and whose face we will see.
Amen.