

## SERMON : FIRST SUNDAY IN ADVENT 2020 (Hope!)

MAY the words of my mouth and the meditations in our hearts be acceptable in your sight O Lord, our strength and our Redeemer. <Amen>

Happy New Year! As one annual “cycle” of our church year ends ... another begins ... and oh how we enter the year:

*“In those days ... the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will be falling from heaven, and the powers in the heavens will be shaken.”*

These are Jesus words to his disciples. The disciples have been admiring the temple and the large stones. They are impressed. Jesus, however, is telling them that change, BIG CHANGE, is on the way. The temple of THEIR LIFE is coming down.

It sounds ominous and it is. Advent (“The Coming” or “The Arrival”) is not just a liturgical season of the church year. It is a reality of life. It happens in all sorts of ways. It comes at various points in life, not just the four or five weeks before Christmas.

If you have ever experienced significant change in your life, whether desired or dreaded, you know about “those days.” You know about Advent. You know what it is like to enter the darkness of change. All change, whether welcome or unwanted, brings some kind of loss. It may be the loss of a relationship, the loss of a loved one, the loss of what is comfortable, familiar, safe. The loss of the way things used to be done. **Regardless, the world as we have known it has ended.**

Pause for a moment. Reflect upon what has happened to you, your family, your friends, our world ... in 2020. What was! What is! <PAUSE> What is to come? <PAUSE>

Looking back on The Advents of our lives sets before us important questions. How will we find our way forward when the usual lights that illumined our path no longer shine? What do we do when it feels as if our world is falling apart? Where do we go when it seems as if darkness is our only companion and God is, perhaps, no where to be seen?

The dark times of life are threshold moments. The temptation is to do something; to fix it, to ease the pain, to escape the uncertainty, and to get back to what used to be. The God of Advent does not allow that. We can never go back to the way it was before the lights went out!

**BUT REMEMBER ... Advent is not so much about the losses as it is about the HOPE and COMING of WHAT WILL Be.**

That hope and coming is the Son of Man, Jesus the Christ.

Every time we tell the Advent stories of our lives we echo the prophet Isaiah’s cry, “O that you would tear open the heavens and come down” (Is. 64:1). And God does. God is faithful. God strengthens us to the end. In the midst of our losses we lack nothing as we await the revealing of Lord Jesus Christ. (1 Cor. 1:7-9).

The Advent times of life are times of waiting. In Advent times we live between what was and what will be. Think pre\_Covid ... to ... post-Covid. <PAUSE> We are neither here nor there. We are betwixt and between. Advent times are times of transition and it is hard, sometimes even impossible, to see the way forward.

I put to you this morning that Advent times remind us that we do not know everything. We do not see all possibilities. We can neither predict nor control anything. We are not in charge. Advent times challenge us to give up our usual sources of illumination, to let go of our habitual ways of knowing, and to question our typical ways of seeing.

Advent times invite us to receive the God who comes to us in the darkness of life.

With that 'first Advent', it was clear that God's rescue operation for humans and the world had been decisively begun but NOT YET completed.

Jesus really did launch God's kingdom 'on earth as in heaven' in his public ministry, his death and his resurrection.

But it was clear, that the Kingdom would then need to progress through the humble, self-giving service of Jesus' followers, **until the time when Jesus returned to finish the work, to put all things right, to banish evil and death for ever, and to bring heaven and earth completely together.**

So here again, we are betwixt and between.

We celebrate Jesus' first coming, and use that sense of fulfilment to fuel our hope for his second coming and to strengthen us to work for signs of that kingdom in our own day.

WE live BETWEEN the first Advent and the second.

That is one way of saying what it means to be a follower of Jesus.

So, as we journey through Advent 2020 together our readings, hymns, studies, reflections, I ask YOU to ponder and pray through what all this means:

*what it meant that first time,*

*what it means today,*

*what it will mean in the future.*

My prayer is that this Advent will help us as individuals, groups and churches to grow 'Advent people':

***people of light in a dark world, people of hope in times and places of despair. People who follow Jesus.***

I runga e te Ingoa o te Atua, te Matua, te Tama me te Wairua Tapu.  
In the name of God, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit <AMINE>