

The Lord's Good Time – Advent 2 2017

Isaiah 40 vv 1-11 p723, Psalm 85, II Peter 3 vv 8-15 p1224, Mark 1 vv 1-8 p1002

The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance. II Peter 3⁹.

Quite often we sing the words, *Their cry goes up, "How long?"* Maybe we're troubled by things in the world. Why doesn't God put an end to the terrible wars we keep reading about? Why doesn't He end poverty? How come, if there is a good God, there are such things as plague, pestilence and famine? Why are there homeless people on our streets? Why doesn't God put an end to this wicked world and bring in His Kingdom of justice, mercy and peace?

We'll very soon be celebrating Christmas with the wonderful story of the baby Jesus born and laid in the manger. It's such a wonderful story and Christmas will capture the imagination of far more people than normally come to Church. Its message of faith, hope and love is good news for the whole world. But we may well be singing the carol which includes the verse, *Yet with the woes of sin and strife, The world has suffered long; Beneath the angel-strain have rolled Two thousand years of wrong; And man, at war with man, hears not The love-song which they bring; O hush the noise, ye men of strife, And hear the angels sing.* I remember a very good Christian man asking me why that is still the case? Why have there been 2,000 years of wrong since that first Christmas? Why don't the men of strife hear the love song which the angels bring? Why doesn't God make us listen?

We may also wonder why our prayers don't seem to be answered for someone we've been praying for for a long time in serious trouble or sickness or maybe even why God doesn't seem to answer our own prayers for ourselves and doesn't take away the pains we have to bear and which we keep asking Him to relieve us of?

Advent, of course, is not only about preparing for Christmas. It is about preparing for the Lord's return on the Last Day to judge the living and the dead. In fact, I should say that the theme of Advent is much more about preparing for Christ's Second Coming than it is preparing to celebrate His first coming. The New Testament promise is that this Lord Jesus will return again. He will judge the living and the dead. *We, according to His promise, look for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells.* It is at His second coming that Jesus finally puts an end to sin and pain and death. The early Christians longed for that day and eagerly anticipated it's coming, but, by the time of S Peter's second letter which we heard read to us today, faith was wavering. Why hasn't it happened yet? Why hasn't Jesus yet returned? *Scoffers will come in the last days, Peter says, walking according to their own lusts, and saying, "Where is the promise of His coming? For since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of creation."* What difference has Jesus made? When is God going to act? Does God even really exist and, if He does exist, when is He going to do something about the state of the world? How can there be a God Who is all good and all powerful if He doesn't do something to stop wars and famines and plagues and earthquakes? Why does He not immediately answer the prayers of faithful people to take the pain away? *Their cry goes up, "How long?"* The unbelievers mock and maybe even the faithful come to doubt. Is the Gospel true? Was Christmas just a good story after all?

Peter gives various answers and there are others too in the Bible and in the teachings of faithful Christians down the ages. God's time isn't our time. *A thousand ages in thy sight are like an evening gone.* God knows what He is doing. We can trust Him to act in His own good time. He is all powerful and all loving. Therefore, He knows so much better than we do what is good for us. God is giving us time, time to come to repentance so that we should not perish in the coming judgment. God grants human beings freedom to love Him or to reject Him and His perfect Law. Much of, if not all of, the pain in the world is caused by our disobedience to our Creator. It isn't God's fault that the world is the way it is; it's our fault. God can work through our pain to make us better people. *Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, By whom also we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God. And not only so, but we glory in tribulations also: knowing that tribulation worketh patience; And patience, experience; and experience, hope: And hope maketh not ashamed; because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us.*(Romans 5¹⁻⁵). There are various attempts at answering these questions, which are really beyond our understanding, but perhaps the best answer is the millions of people who have found these things to be true in their lives. *Hope maketh not ashamed.* For two thousand years, people all over the world have been putting their trust in Jesus and have found that their trust is not disappointed. There may be many discouragements, questions which seem unanswerable, pains which seem unbearable, problems which seem insuperable, and yet people have found the Gospel to be true in their lives. We have found the Gospel to be true in our lives. *Hope maketh not ashamed.* We might not always get what we ask for in our prayers but we know that God is with us. We can't perhaps see how God is keeping His promises to us but we know that He is. It is our own personal experience of God which confirms our hope and, when our own faith is weak, we have the love and faith of our fellow Christians to sustain us.

Therefore, since all these things will be dissolved, what manner of persons ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness, looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God? We trust Him. We await His coming, seeking His grace to live in such a way that we are always ready to meet Him, working for the coming of His kingdom, hastening the day by holy conduct and godly lives, walking with the Lord in this life of time and space, knowing that one day we shall, by His grace, reign with Him in all eternity.

