
Scripture, Reflection, Church news and up-to-date info

1st December 2024

First Sunday of advent

The start of advent
leading up to
Christmas.

This week

St Barnabas -
Eucharist
9:30 am

Holy Trinity -
Eucharist
11 am

Bible Study (St
Barnabas)
Wednesday
10 am

Worship on
Wednesday

Holy Trinity
(WOW)
7 pm



Collect

Almighty God, give us grace to cast away the works of darkness, and put on the armor of light, now in the time of this mortal life in which your Son Jesus Christ came to visit us in great humility; that in the last day, when he shall come again in his glorious majesty to judge both the living and the dead, we may rise to the life immortal; through him who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.

Old Testament - Jeremiah 33:14-16

The days are coming,' declares the Lord, 'when I will fulfill the good promise I made to the people of Israel and Judah.

In those days and at that time

I will make a righteous Branch sprout from David's line;

he will do what is just and right in the land.

In those days Judah will be saved

and Jerusalem will live in safety.

This is the name by which it will be called:

The Lord Our Righteous Savior.'

Epistle - Thessalonians 3:9-13

How can we thank God enough for you in return for all the joy we have in the presence of our God because of you? Night and day we pray most earnestly that we may see you again and supply what is lacking in your faith.

Now may our God and Father himself and our Lord Jesus clear the way for us to come to you. May the Lord make your love increase and overflow for each other and for everyone else, just as ours does for you. May he strengthen your hearts so that you will be blameless and holy in the presence of our God and Father when our Lord Jesus comes with all his holy ones.

The Gospel - luke 21:25-36

“There will be signs in the sun, moon and stars. On the earth, nations will be in anguish and perplexity at the roaring and tossing of the sea. People will faint from terror, apprehensive of what is coming on the world, for the heavenly bodies will be shaken. At that time they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. When these things begin to take place, stand up and lift up your heads, because your redemption is drawing near.”

He told them this parable: “Look at the fig tree and all the trees. When they sprout leaves, you can see for yourselves and know that summer is near. Even so, when you see these things happening, you know that the kingdom of God is near.

“Truly I tell you, this generation will certainly not pass away until all these things have happened. Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away.

“Be careful, or your hearts will be weighed down with carousing, drunkenness and the anxieties of life, and that day will close on you suddenly like a trap. For it will come on all those who live on the face of the whole earth. Be always on the watch, and pray that you may be able to escape all that is about to happen, and that you may be able to stand before the Son of Man.”

Reflection by Sarah Wilding

Advent is about coming, or more specifically about waiting for a coming. We wait to celebrate the coming of the Christ child, but we are also waiting for his second coming, when he will wrap up the affairs of history, do away with evil and bring in his glorious kingdom. In New Testament times people expected the two not to be very far apart; they expected Jesus to return maybe tomorrow, or next month or next year. Certainly within their own lifetime. But we have a different perspective: the church has been waiting for over 2,000 years now, so we know there will be a second coming but most of us don't expect it to be tomorrow or next week, nor probably within our own lifetime. As T.S. Eliot says (in *The Hollow Men*):

"Between the idea
And the reality
Between the motion
And the act
Falls the shadow"

We are living there, in that in-between place, in the shadow. Of course, we are also in another in-between: between ministers. One vicar has come and gone and now we wait for another to come; it might be this year or next or even longer, who knows? We are doubly in the shadow, so how do we live in that place?

Jeremiah looked ahead to the first coming, of the branch of David, but when he came Jesus saw himself as the vine, the trunk, of which we are the branches. He said, "I am the vine, you are the branches. Those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit, because apart from me you can do nothing." While we wait for the fulfilment of all promises, we are to abide in him. What does that mean? First, it means that we need to have a connection to Jesus so that his life can flow into

ours. There's no air gap, we're to be grafted in tight and entwined. We relate to God directly, not through a priest; a vicar is never meant to be a substitute for God but rather to help us to know and follow him ourselves. People connect with God through many different pathways. I'm not talking about other religions here but different personalities. One person may connect to God through nature, where another will connect through community and friendship. One may connect through singing and another through intellectual study. One may connect through service to others and another through solitude and contemplation. One may connect through liturgy and poetry, another through spontaneous impulses and promptings. Or any combination of these things. We are all different, but what all these things need is time. Time spent with God is vital in order to receive the sap of his Spirit so we can then take him into the world.

Second, abide means to stay. Stay with him, stay in him. Don't leave, don't give up when the going gets hard; not on Jesus, nor on the church, which is his people, our spiritual family. If you're feeling angry or disillusioned or fed up, don't let it drive you away from him. Rather, take it to the Lord and use it to draw closer to him. I confess there was a time I was ready to give up on church; there were people I was struggling with and finding annoying and I was finding church a trial rather than a blessing; if I hadn't been married to the pastor I may well have left. But then the Lord got through to me and I realised that, out of a church of about

100 people, there were two or three that I had issues with and got aggravated over. So that's 97 whose company I appreciated, who were much easier to love. I coped much better after that change in perspective. If we leave we don't get to that, we don't work through

the difficulties, we don't come to a new place but drift into a worse one. This is why we need to stay connected to Jesus, we need him working into our lives. We can't go it alone. And when we have a connection, that needs to be affecting how we live, i.e. bearing fruit. Think about the energiser bunny: it doesn't matter how long-lasting the batteries are, if it is not used, the batteries don't hold their charge until we're interested in playing with it. They leak and not only fade but corrode the connections so that the item becomes useless. So it with us, we need to keep up not only the connection but the outworking of it.

And thirdly, to abide means to live in a place; I abide in Oldham, it's where I dwell. To live is to be active and growing. The Thessalonian church had an issue in that their expectation of Jesus' return was so strong that some people had opted out of life in order to wait; they'd given up work because there was really no point in it any more. So when Paul says, "warn the idle," (1 Thess 5:14) it's that kind of people he's talking about. There are any number of dystopian science fiction books and films where this kind of thing happens: a meteor is due to hit earth on x date and society breaks down into disorder and violence. No-one works the fields any more so there is no food. Because what's the point if everybody's going to die. They have effectively stopped living before their time is up. Those Thessalonians knew Jesus and loved him so much they couldn't be bothered with this life. On the other hand, abiding is also not frantically running around like a headless chicken or being a busybody. It's not about productivity but involvement. Not everybody has the energy or health to be very busy, but we can all pray. Indeed, praying is not a second fiddle activity but highly important: the elderly and housebound prayer warriors of the church are its

backbone. Living and dwelling are more about seeking first the kingdom of God and following where he takes us.

If we start to think life is pointless because we are soon going to die, well, we've been going to die since the day we were conceived. It might be in ten minutes or ten years or a hundred years but it is going to happen. As the saying goes, you might go out tomorrow and be run over by a bus. It's a bit of a joke, except that we knew somebody it happened to. It was utterly devastating to everyone in the church; she was a very significant person and it was such a shocking thing to happen. But she was ready; she was living her life devoted to God. Likewise, we knew a young man years ago who had felt God's call to go into the ministry yet died in a car accident. That was really puzzling, why would God call him if he was going to take him? But that's the thing, he was living his life for God right up to the end. He was ready. Make no mistake, Jesus is coming. Even if he doesn't come in glory, he will come to take us to him. Are you ready? So as we go through advent, as we anticipate the coming of Jesus, it's a good time to reflect on our lives and think about how we can abide in him in the in-between, and how we can put him and his kingdom first in our lives.

Notices

15/12/24 @ 6pm: **Annual Carol Service** @ St Barnabas
18/12/24 @ 7pm: **Annual Carol Service** @ Holy Trinity
24/12/24 @ 4pm: **Christingle Service** @ Holy Trinity

24/12/24 @ 11.30pm: **Midnight Mass** @ Holy Trinity
25/12/24 @ 9.30am: **Christmas Service** @ St Barnabas

Useful Contacts

Lay Readers:

Peter Haslam (0161) 345 0215

Lucie Reilly (07880) 861 751

Wardens:

Peter Haslam (STB) (0161) 345 0215

Val Crane (HTW) (0161) 628 4977

John Wolstencroft (HTW) (0161) 620 2401

Administrators:

STB - Sarah Gura (07708) 714 813

HTW - Vicky Heaton (07906) 077058

Community Worker:

MaryAnne Oduntan (07908) 004 682

Hall Hire and Enquires:

HTW Daniel Reilly (07788) 860 764

STB MaryAnne Oduntan (07908) 004 682

Church Magazine: Sarah Wilding - sarah.churchmag@gmail.com
Newsletter & Socials: Tom Reilly - churchinfowaterhead@gmail.com