

Year C Advent Sunday Gospel Luke 21.25-36 HTK 2021

At this time of the year, we are inundated with offers of calendars for the coming year. There's the Bureau of Meteorology one, the Age has its annual Leunig one and every newsagent has calendars resplendent with dogs and cats, even old Masters and Impressionists.

But here is slightly different advertisement that caught my eye a few weeks ago. It's for an Advent calendar with a difference. Each day during Advent you open up the relevant window of the house and out pops a bottle of wine, albeit a miniature. Brought to you by Laithwaites that well known purveyor of fine quality stuff. However, there is a slight problem, there's only twenty-four windows! For some reason I cannot fathom, they believe that Advent starts next Wednesday, December 1. It doesn't it starts today.

So, what does this say about the crazy world we live in? Nothing is sacred. Not even Advent. And as for the timing, it probably did not fit in with the numbering system but who cares, its just a marketing exercise after all.

What this illustrates is that time is not always as straightforward as it seems. So, for example, from the perspective of those living like us in the Eastern Hemisphere, today is still yesterday on the other side of the Pacific Ocean

With anticipation of a joyful event time might seem to move quite slowly, while on the other hand, a dreaded event can arrive far too quickly. There's never enough time or always too much. Time might feel feather-light or brick-heavy depending on whether it expands one dreams or diminishes one's hopes.

Jesus in Luke's gospel for the day reminds us that God is not constrained by the *chronos* time represented by calendar and clock, the sort of time that keeps everything from happening at once, perhaps best called linear time. Whereas in God's *kairos* time, past and future are woven together, there is only now, today.

Advent asks us to ponder the question, "What time is it? What time is it in your life? In the life of the nation? In the mission of the church? In planetary history? Do you really know- or care- what time it is? While some moments are undoubtedly more definitive than others in our lives and in the world, it may well be the dualism implied in the seeming contrast between *kairos* and *chronos* time is not all that real. For it suggests that clock time is only occasionally revelation-time and *kairos* time is somehow spiritually and metaphysically set apart from the rest of our lives. The division I surmise is not that simple.

Advent I suggest is about holistic living and awakening, knowing that Christ comes to us in every moment. Every moment is a second coming. Every moment the realm of God draws nearer. Every moment is a *kairos* moment in which Christ is born in that mystery that we call Christmas.

Even the gospel for the day when misinterpreted has the capacity to do more harm than good. Throughout Christian history those who have focused on verses 25 to 28 in all their apocalyptic glory have assumed (invariably wrongly) that they could recognise the signs of the times and that they would be among God's chosen.

However, what is clear is that the message on this first Sunday of Advent paints a hope filled picture for "all who live on the face of the earth" (Luke 21.34).

Jesus certainly speaks in the language of apocalyptic, extraordinary word pictures or revelation. Vivid images - the heavens being shaken, the Son of humanity appearing in the clouds - these depend on the metaphors capacity to express a community's trauma while also offering powerful hope in the midst of those experiences.

Knowing what time it is - and practising an Advent spirituality - means that we look for holy moments in the small and large events of life. There is a crisis - a moment of decision - and opportunity in every encounter. We can notice the tears of a child or rejoice in his or her playing with a puzzle or we can simply turn away fixated on our agendas. We can look into the eyes of our beloved or simply see

everything as routine. A sunrise can just be an annoying reminder that we have to go to work, or it can be for us, the face of God. The media can fill us with dread or inspire us to action to become partners in God's shalom: his Peace.

Now a little apocalypse goes a long way, but not in the pathways of the telly evangelists. Apocalyptic thinking should awaken us to the eschatology or end point of each moment, rising and perishing, but in its transitoriness, also give us the opportunity to experience holiness. "This is the day God has made" and we are accountable for our openness to God's inspiration.

For early Christians, Advent and Lent mirrored each other as an opportunity for spiritual reflection. What do we need to reflect on today? What time is it for us? Where is God speaking in the many events of life?

We don't need to be Scrooge-like to experience an Advent spirituality. Advent spirituality does not mean simply turning our backs on the Christmas season or banning Christmas carols from worship. But how overwhelmed we can become on Black Friday sales on consumption and thinking we can make everyone happy with our present under the tree when real happiness comes from our presence – listening, seeing, loving touching. Or at worst we can buy a cardboard box covered in twenty four tiny windows and faithfully each day extract the miniature bottle behind it and have a quiet tippie.

