



St James's
Church
Piccadilly

28 November 2021 First Sunday of Advent Sermon – St James's
Piccadilly

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'This revolution will not be televised; it will be lived'

May I speak in the Name of the
Triune God, Father, Son and Holy
Spirit.

Amen.

2,000 years is a long time to be
waiting for a visit from a well-
known and beloved friend.
Perhaps that is why there is so
much drama associated with the
notion of Jesus's return to our
earthly realm. I mean, if humanity
has waited so long, then there can
be no greater physical entrance
back to our planet for Jesus than
"the Son of Man coming in a
cloud".

We hear today in Luke's Gospel
quoting Jesus:
"There will be signs in the sun, the
moon,
and the stars, and on the earth
distress among nations confused
by the roaring of the sea and the

waves" (Luke 21:25).

For us in the past seven days, the
sea and waves have underlined
the fact that a transformation is
needed and that something has to
change. This is the week in which
we lost 27 of our own, of our
human race, in the stretch of water
somewhere between England and
France. 27 Dead, including a
pregnant woman and three
children. Drowned. This is the
week in which another woman
was killed at the hands of a
stranger: 18-year-old Bobbie-Anne
McLeod from Plymouth. And this
is the week in which another one
of our children was fatally stabbed,
12-year-old Ava White in
Liverpool. May all their souls rest
in peace, and rise in glory.

Advent, with its big themes of
death, judgement, heaven and hell

is framed by expectation, by expectant, *not disillusioned*, waiting, by the urgency of being rather fed-up with the here and now, and by reimagining a better world. It is a revolutionised world for which we wait, a world in which there is equity and justice, and in which mercy and compassion are the norm. The Advent season is there to shake us up and remind us that this revolution will not be televised, it will be lived.

The power of Jesus's words and imagery made his apostles and many in the early church believe that the return of Jesus following his death, rising and resurrection was imminent. After all, Jesus does say in Luke 21:32-33:

“Truly I tell you, this generation will not pass away until all things have taken place. Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away”.

How could they *not* think that they would live to see Jesus's return to walk and eat with them again? Since then, generations of Christians have believed in this second coming, which, like faith, disturbs our rational post-enlightenment thinking. How can we make sense of the rather

bizarre assertion that somehow there will be this cosmic opening between heaven and earth and a new world order, this kingdom of God, will be established?

In this first Sunday of Advent, the sense of the eternal is rooted in an earthly reveal of a plain that we cannot yet see. And we are asked to be ready. Because this revolution will not be televised, it will be lived. We read again in Luke 21: 34-35:

“Be on guard so that your hearts are not weighed down with dissipation and drunkenness and the worries of this life, and that day does not catch you unexpectedly, like a trap. For it will come upon all who live on the face of the whole earth”.

We are asked to be alert, and I wonder whether this is a request not so much towards what will be, but rather a call to *what is*, to be alert to the *here and now* and to all that needs to change. We are not being called to wait passively, but to wait in an active state. It is a state of becoming, in which we are agitated by the Spirit, because we are being asked to *participate* in making a world in which, as we hear in Jeremiah, “justice and

righteousness” has already been implemented, and that these are the default settings. We are being invited to co-create a new world that is supported by new structures in which there is no room for misogyny, homophobia and any of the -isms we all suffer at this time.

Is it too much to ask that we bring children back from the brink of enacting violent acts against one another? Is it too much to ask that a woman can walk from her home to meet friends in a city in this or any country and not face harassment, assault or even death?

In the 1990s, Dr Denis Mukwege, the gynaecologist from the Democratic Republic of Congo who won the Nobel-prize in 2018 for his campaigning against sexual violence as a weapon of war, built “a hospital in Panzi, a suburb of Bukavu, in the DRC, that became a maternal and sexual health facility”.¹ It is now the epicentre of integrative care for victims and survivors of those acts against women, against their bodies and minds that are now so

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<https://www.theguardian.com/society/2021/nov/06/i-cant-explain-how-i-am-still-alive-dr-denis-mukwege-on-risking-his-life-to-save-african-women>

commonplace in global conflicts. In a recent article to support his new book ‘The Power of Women’ the journalist writes that “Mukwege believes that challenging misogyny in peacetime is paramount, in order to fortify society in moments of conflict”. *Challenging misogyny in peacetime is paramount, in order to fortify society in moments of conflict.*

Let us not be beguiled into thinking that what happens *there*, in those far off theatres of war could never happen here. How we live in peacetime, what we tolerate in peacetime, will only be exacerbated by social unrest and, even worse, by national or international conflict. We are in Advent, and the heaviness of death, judgement, heaven and hell must frame the lens through which we see our world and current events.

“no one leaves home unless home is the mouth of a shark you only run for the border when you see the whole city running as well

your neighbours running faster than you
breath bloody in their throats
the boy you went to school with

who kissed you dizzy behind the
old tin factory
is holding a gun bigger than his
body
you only leave home
when home won't let you stay.

no one leaves home unless home
chases you
fire under feet
hot blood in your belly
it's not something you ever
thought of doing
until the blade burnt threats into
your neck
and even then you carried the
anthem under
your breath
only tearing up your passport in an
airport toilets
sobbing as each mouthful of paper
made it clear that you wouldn't be
going back.

you have to understand,
that no one puts their children in a
boat
unless the water is safer than the
land".²

These are words by Warsan Shire,
British poet born in Kenya to
Somalian parents. Her poem
entitled 'Home' makes clear the
reality in which we live and how
our justifications of the world as it

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<https://scholarblogs.emory.edu/complit203/2017/05/02/password-dance/>

is now starting to wear a little thin
in the face of the constancy of the
promise of God's "steadfast love"
(Psalm 25). It is not enough for us
to sit and read the news and pray
and hope. Because this revolution
will not be televised, it will be lived.

A few years ago, a close friend of
mine bought me a greeting card,
on the front of which read "Jesus
is coming, look busy." It was an
inside joke as we often talked
about how I could be *less* busy,
with a diary that gave me some
room to breathe, and write letters
and be a better friend, a more
attentive sister and daughter and
well, a more grounded human
being and woman. But there is
truth in those words on the card.
We *do* need to be busy. We need
to be busy making the world we
want to see, and it starts with our
streets, our communities, our
cities, our church here at St
James's and our Church (with a
capital C). We need to be busy
making the world fairer, safer,
more whole, not just for women
and girls, though that may be *my*
heart's call, but for men and boys
and children and young people of
all identities.

In Advent, we are not expected to
wait, gin and tonic or cordial in
hand deciding what next to binge

watch on our streaming channel of choice. We are expected to question *what exactly we are waiting for*. And that is why Advent matters. Because I am not waiting for Jesus and the heavenly host to come down with “clouds descending”, however wonderful the image and however joyful Wesley’s lyrics. I am waiting for *us*. I am waiting for *us* to hear something of what the world could be and to lay down our prayers, our hearts, and knowledge and skills and imagination and hands and feet to make it so. Advent is the season when we lay down our imagination to the service of a world filled with potential to be so much more than this. A revolutionised world for we know that this revolution will not be televised; it will be lived.

This Advent Sunday, we read that “Jerusalem will live in safety” (Jeremiah 33:16). That is a delicious promise that I cannot yet see, can you? “Be alert at all times” says Jesus in Luke 21:36, “praying that you may have the strength to escape all these things that will take place, and to stand before the Son of Man”.

The things that are taking place now, in our beloved world, in

which we believe Jesus already is through the Holy Spirit, overwhelm and overpower so many. This Advent let us recommit ourselves to doing our part, to hearing God’s call to bring the world in line with the promise of a world made whole. In Mukwege words “We all have the power to change the course of history when the beliefs we are fighting for are right”. This revolution will not be televised; it must be lived.

Amen.