

Prepare to stand before Jesus and meet his gaze

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Advent Sunday C – Jrm 33 14-16, Ps 25 1-10, 1 Thess 3 9-13, Lk 21 25-38

A brief homily.

I can hardly think of an Advent Sunday where the Gospel cry for justice and grace has spoken more plainly to this world. Those apocalyptic images from the Gospel – ²⁵*...on the earth distress among nations confused by the roaring of the sea and the waves.* ²⁶ *People...fainting from fear and foreboding of what is coming upon the world* – it seems no exaggeration to imagine that this time is upon us. You may disagree.

But people hear this message quite differently from each other. Think of how these Gospel images have been heard in Pacific island churches earlier this morning; or how Jeremiah's promise of justice and righteousness is heard among peoples excluded from our rich-nations club. The islanders are living the environmental apocalypse right now. And they and others in the 'developing world' are living the Covid apocalypse without access to enough vaccine for their people while we muse about booster shots.

The islanders bore the prophetic cry for justice to COP-26, but they were met with obdurate rejection by our nation and many others. Can we hear the cry to God from today's Psalm as they would have heard it a few hours ago; ² *God, let none who wait for you be put to shame: but let those that break faith be confounded and gain nothing.* They must place their trust in the one who is coming, because the world has broken faith with them. And we are part of that world which has broken faith.

Advent Sunday begins the season when we get ourselves ready for Jesus to come; get ourselves fit to stand before Jesus and meet his gaze. Are we ready? This is not about individual, personal piety or anything so banal. The readiness in question means making sure that we as a church are hearing the Gospel, living it *and* in a voice that won't be ignored, proclaiming to power the Gospel cry for justice and grace for the least of Christ's children.

I get letters from charities which ask me to direct the church's charity to oppressed Christians in other countries. I feel uneasy that Christians are singled out as the only ones we should be helping. Jesus made no such faith distinctions. It seems to me that we as a church – a rich church in a rich economy – that we should be very obviously doing the Gospel work of living and proclaiming good news to the poor, bringing release to captives, recovery of sight to the blind and setting the oppressed free. ^{Lk 4.18}

It's a huge task, but whether we make big inroads or small steps on this journey, that is most definitely the road we must be travelling when he comes to meet us. Amen