**Reflections – First Sunday of Advent - 1st December 2024**

**Hopeful beginnings**

**Luke 21:25-36**

**Begin with an opening prayer**

Father God,
as we begin this season of Advent,
a season of watching and waiting,
fill us with your hope
that we might be bearers of hope to others.
**Amen.**

 **Read the passage**

*Consider different ways to read the text. For example, hearing it in more than one version of the Bible.*

### 25“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. 26People will faint from terror, apprehensive of what is coming on the world, for the heavenly bodies will be shaken. 27At that time they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. 28When these things begin to take place, stand up and lift up your heads, because your redemption is drawing near.”

### 29He told them this parable: “Look at the fig tree and all the trees. 30When they sprout leaves, you can see for yourselves and know that summer is near. 31Even so, when you see these things happening, you know that the kingdom of God is near.

### 32“Truly I tell you, this generation will certainly not pass away until all these things have happened. 33Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away.

### 34“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. 35For it will come on all those who live on the face of the whole earth. 36Be 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.”

**Explore and respond to the text**

*Start by reading the Bible notes below. You may want to read them more than once, or pause after each paragraph to reflect on what you have read.*

**Bible notes**

This is the latter part of Jesus’ sermon by the Temple before his final meal with his disciples and his arrest. The language and imagery are drawn from the prophets (e.g. Isaiah 13:10, 24:19; Joel 2:10), who speak of the unravelling of the order of creation as God’s judgement dawns. Luke suggests that this has already begun in the distress caused by the destruction of Jerusalem (see Luke 21:20ff). Like Mark, Luke hears Jesus speaking into his time and place, here to believers living in a Roman city, in words that have abiding significance (vv.32-33). The ‘Son of Man coming in a cloud’ (v.27) is mysterious but Jesus sees himself as Daniel’s glorious figure, who, despite his rejection by powerful earthly rulers, is honoured by God.

Luke is the only one of the evangelists to write a second volume, the Acts of the Apostles, which narrates the outcome of Jesus’ divine vindication – the birth of God’s messianic people through the coming of the Holy Spirit. Jesus’ parable of the fig tree and its springtime leaves anticipates this. With their hope- filled birthright, Jesus’ followers must avoid being dragged down by distractions, like the seed that falls among thorns in Jesus’ parable of the sower (v.34; cf Luke 8:7,14). Instead, they are called to be alert and prayerful enough to look beyond themselves (vv.28,36), which is what Jesus expects of his three closest disciples just before his arrest (Luke 22:39-46) and to hold their nerve in whatever crises they face, as they wait for the day of God’s kingdom (v.31).

 **Reflection**

*Spend a few moments thinking about what stands out for you from the Bible reading. This idea may help.*

I wonder if you can remember what any of your school reports said about you? Were you described as ‘hardworking and conscientious’, or quite the opposite? Albert Einstein’s teacher once said, ‘He will never amount to anything’. And Winston Churchill’s school report read, ‘He has no ambition. He is a constant trouble to everybody and is always in some scrape or other. He cannot be trusted to behave’. Sometimes, someone not expected to amount to much does something great. Sometimes, hope appears in an unanticipated way. Sometimes, hope appears when we have given up. At Advent, we look towards Jesus’ coming and the hope he brings to all people.

**Questions for reflection**

*You may wish to use these questions and the picture to help you think about or discuss issues arising from this week’s Bible passage.*

**Questions**

* What things in nature bring you hope?
* What are you hoping for right now?
* What is your prayer at the start of Advent?

**Prayer**

God of all hope and all seasons,
we praise you for your promise that the darkest night will pass
and the dawn bring new hope and light;
the fiercest storm will subside
and your grace will bring stillness and calm;
the deepest wounds will heal and your love
will bring acceptance and courage;
the season of waiting will end and
you will meet us wonderfully and joyfully.
We thank you for everything and everyone
who draws us closer to you.
**Amen.**