



SERMON PREACHED IN LINCOLN CATHEDRAL BY THE SUBDEAN, THE REVD  
CANON JOHN PATRICK, ON ADVENT SUNDAY, 29TH NOVEMBER 2015.

*May the words of my mouth and the thoughts of all our hearts be acceptable to you, O Lord our Strength and our Redeemer. Amen.*

The Gospel verses this morning present us with an apocalyptic vision of cosmic distress, a vision that will confuse people and usher in the Kingdom of God, *There will be signs in the sun, the moon and the stars, and on the earth distress among nations... They will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory.* An apocalyptic vision, yes, but what do we mean by that? I dare say that for many of us when hear of an apocalypse our thoughts turn to a calamity, a catastrophe, a tragic disaster that affects communities, nation states and whole civilizations. THE END OF WORLD AS WE KNOW IT! Looking at images of apocalypse they are of cities destroyed: smoke rising from the ashes, bridges collapsed and the remnants of buildings now little more than twisted metal and burnt rubble – 9/11 writ large. In Francis Ford Coppola's *Apocalypse Now*, with Martin Sheen's Captain Willard seeking out Marlon Brando's rogue Colonel Kurtz in 1970's Vietnam, you gradually move further into the heart of darkness. Apocalypse is dark and sober material.

But, looking beyond the destructive visions of Hollywood, I suggest, we see a different meaning to apocalypse and one, I believe, that shows us far more about the **true** nature of God.

The first thing I do in the morning is open my curtain and, at the moment, peer out into the early morning November gloom to see what the day looks like: and usually at six o'clock in the morning what is revealed at the moment is not that good! We can be a little more hopeful when the curtains pulled back are those at a theatre: the stage is revealed and we're ready for the play to begin. And then as we sit and watch a story beyond the curtains we can be entertained, educated and amused. And perhaps we can learn a little more about human nature and about ourselves and about the world in which we live.

St Luke draws back the curtains this morning with a dramatic scene: mighty seas, fear and foreboding, people fainting from fear. A dramatic scene but one none the less that enables us to learn something of the true nature of God. Luke's words are a disclosure of knowledge, about the drawing back of the curtain, **unveiling that which lies behind** for that is the literal meaning of the word apocalyptic 'unveiling that which lies behind'. Luke looks back to the Book of Daniel – which was particularly well known at the time of Christ and when the Gospel was being written – both in Daniel and in the Gospel record we hear of the dramatic and urgent character of the coming of the Son of Man and the immediacy of the Kingdom of God. It's apocalyptic – the curtain is being drawn back and unveiling that which lies behind.

The character of this, and every, Advent Sunday is apocalyptic. But that does not mean strange or implausible, suspect or just plain bonkers! What it does remind us is that even when we see devastation and desolation around us, something is being unveiled. Something that we can only see with the eye of faith **is** being revealed.

The challenge that we have is to see the world – through the power of the Holy Spirit – as created by God and redeemed by Jesus Christ. The prayer never far from our lips, *Enable with perpetual light The dullness of our blinded sight.*

Yes, we do indeed have “dull sight” but there are moments when God’s light shines through and enlightens the darkness. The Eucharist in which we now share is such a moment: with every celebration being an unveiling and the breaking in of that world shaped by the generosity of God. And that world also breaks in with a simple act of kindness, a kind word spoken, an act of selfless generosity, the comforting of the sick and the dying, a still presence in the midst of terror and of fear.

Part of what God calls us to as Christian disciples is to lift the veil and reveal His works. And what better time than Advent when we await again the coming of the Child of Bethlehem but also the very real hope that Christ will come again and the cry *Amen, Come Lord Jesus* is never far from our lips.

Advent time is to be valued; Advent time is of now and not yet; Advent time is when all is fulfilled, and yet the Kingdom is yet to come. Advent time is when we need to exercise patience and understanding; Advent time, I would suggest, is **sacred** time. Time that is holy and blessed and set aside by God. Time when we can lift the veil and know more of God ourselves and time when we can let others see beyond the curtain.

It is of course far from easy: next week we’ll be in the midst of the Christmas Market and on many levels it will be a joyous and happy time; but I do wonder as I watch people going around – with faces that are not always lit up with sheer bliss – and hear the strains of *Rudolph the Red Nosed Reindeer, Frosty the Snowman* and *Santa Baby* that there is an awareness that something is missing amidst the twinkling lights and tinsel glitter.

I’d like to think that when people enter this church next week, take some time out from the heaving crowds heaven would break in – even if for a moment; that a moment, a sacred time will be found when the veil will be lifted and God is allowed to break into peoples lives and we can tell them the true message of Advent and Christmas and this sacred time – that’s part of our God given mission this coming week.

I occasionally get asked, twice this week as it happens, what does the Cathedral do in respect to Mission. I suspect they are expecting a detailed Mission Statement and for me to role off a list of wonderful things that we do in proclaiming the Kingdom of God. Well I could do that. But what I’d really like to say is that what we seek to do – what I do and what you do – is be alert to God’s presence, be attentive to the promptings of the Holy Spirit, to use our talents in the work of the Gospel. We do that day in day out, week in week out; we’ll do it next week for the Christmas Market, during the whole of Advent and Christmas and then into the New Year. It’s God’s Mission that we serve, his disciples and followers and therefore part of his apocalyptic work.

Amen.