

# The Motivation ...



*A Whole New World*



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## ADVENT SUNDAY



### Mark 13: 24-37

#### Reflection:

It's tempting to read passages like this as a prediction of God returning to earth as a military conqueror to destroy the people we consider to be evil and to establish a God-controlled empire on earth. But, to read Mark that way is to misunderstand both the Gospel writer and Jesus. Mark wrote at a time of war, when Israel was being conquered by the Roman Army, and he is reminding his readers that Jesus had spoken about this very thing happening. The language Jesus uses is the same as that of the Old Testament prophets – full of strong visual imagery, metaphors and symbols. It is not to be taken literally.

For us the key here is to grasp

the heart of Jesus' message - no matter what you may see going on in the world, God is not surprised, God is always coming to us and calling us to participate in God's reign in our world, and, to do this, we need to be alert and mindful, always aware of the signs of God's activity even in the midst of the world's turmoil.

- Where do you see signs of God's coming in your life?
- In what ways can you co-operate with God's activity?
- What can you do to be even more mindful and aware of God's presence and purpose in your life?



**Prayer:** O God who is always present and always seeking entrance into my life, please give me the eyes, the ears, the heart and the faith, to see and embrace the signs of Your coming, and to help others to see them & receive them too. AMEN

## FIRST MONDAY OF ADVENT



### Micah 4: 1-5

#### Reflection:

Micah's vision of God's reign is one of peace and prosperity, with worship at its heart. This aligns very closely with the vision that Jesus gives in his teaching and in his actions. It offers an encouraging message for us – when God comes, the motive is not to destroy, judge or conquer like a military dictator. Rather God seeks to restore and to reconcile.

As always, the challenge of these visions is that we can begin to experience and live out the values of God's reign in our own lives right now. So, take a moment to consider Micah's vision again, but this time, ask yourself how you can begin to embody this vision for yourself this Advent season.

- In what ways can you make your worship – the mountain of God's temple – the most important place in your life, and how can it be something that attracts other people to God?
- How can your life be used by God to bring mediation between those who are in dispute, or to reconcile those who are in conflict?
- How can you contribute to peace and prosperity in your community?

These may sound like big expectations that God has for us, but small actions that respond to these promptings can have a significant impact, if we will just commit to living out our faith and hope daily.



**Prayer:** God of peace and justice, may my worship of you give me a clearer vision of your reign. May my love for you be expressed not just in songs and prayers, but in working for peace and reconciliation, and for prosperity and security, for those with whom I live and work and play. In Jesus name. AMEN

# FIRST TUESDAY OF ADVENT



## Revelation 18: 1-10

### Reflection:

Today we are again faced with the metaphorical, symbolic language of prophecy - this time from John, the writer of the Revelation. Here again, we might be tempted to view this only in terms of judgement and destruction, but there is a message of grace and justice to be found here as well.

The personification of Babylon is a powerful way to depict the temptation to ignore God's ways of justice and peace, and embrace, rather, the ways of power, accumulation and addiction. The excesses that are represented by this arrogant figure are prevalent in our economic, political, and entertainment systems today. We have fallen prey to exactly the dangers that this vision warns against – uncontrolled desire for wealth and power, and the constant, instant gratification of our every desire – and our world, and its peoples are suffering under the weight of our lack of wisdom and responsibility. This is why God calls God's people to distance themselves from this way of being.

The reign of God calls us to be people of simplicity and generosity, not accumulation. The reign of God calls us to be people of service and humility not domination and control. The reign of God calls us to be people of discipline and restraint, not addiction and self-gratification.

Ultimately, God's ways are really common sense, and lead to the best, most abundant, life. But, if we choose to go our own way, we will, eventually, have to face the consequences – as we are doing in our world now.

- So, in what ways have you allowed yourself to become part of these Babylonian ways?
- Are there parts of your life that are still plagued by greed, or the hunger for power or self-gratification – even in small ways?
- In what ways can
- God's coming to you challenge you to release these ways, and embrace the ways of God's reign a little more?
- Choose one thing to practice in particular today.



**Prayer:** God of justice and mercy, you always call us to life that is vibrant and full and that brings life to others. Teach me your ways of simplicity, humility and restraint, and use me, however you can, to bring more of your grace and wisdom into my world. In Jesus name. AMEN

## FIRST WEDNESDAY OF ADVENT



### Micah 5: 1-5a

#### Reflection:

The words of this passage are often quoted around Christmas time – the picture of Bethlehem, the least of the cities of a small, unimportant tribe, being home to God's sent leader who will restore God's people and bring peace.

It's a common theme in Scripture – that God uses the least and most insignificant to accomplish God's purposes. It's an important theme to remember, and it flies in the face of our world's view of importance and success – the meritocracy that applauds only the best, the richest and the most powerful. Once again, God's reign is revealed as an upside-down way of being, and the One who comes in God's name as a humble, peace-bringing

Shepherd, as opposed to a grand, militant conqueror.

Which offers us a new possibility for encountering the God who seeks to come to us again in this Advent season: to find God in the small, the least, the unexpected, the peaceful, the caring and nurturing people and places.

- What are the unexpected places in your life where you would be surprised to find God?
- Can you look deeper in those places and see if you can find evidence of God's presence?
- In what ways can you embody the gentle, humble, peace-making character of God's Sent One?



**Prayer:** Humble and caring God, thank you that you choose the weak and small things of the world to accomplish your purposes. Thank you that I can be one of those things, and that in my small daily commitment to follow you, I can contribute to peace and grace in our world. In Jesus name. AMEN

## FIRST THURSDAY OF ADVENT



### Psalm 85:1-2, 8-13

#### Reflection:

Today the focus shifts toward preparing for this coming Sunday, which introduces us to the messenger of God's coming, John the Baptist. Psalm 85 encourages God's people to listen to God's message of peace, and to allow it to shape their lives. It celebrates God's reign of justice and righteousness, and how these two attributes prepare the way for God's coming. This, of course, was the work that John did – challenging people to confront themselves, change and commit to God's ways in preparation for God's coming.

The temptation here is to become legalistic and make our work of preparation and righteousness the necessary ingredient for God's coming to us. In Christ we

now know that nothing we do can earn God's presence or approval, so it's not about that. Rather, the challenge of this Psalm, and of the Advent season, is to allow God to come into our lives fully so that we are truly changed. Then, as we begin to reflect God's character in our lives, we become heralds of God's coming to others, because they experience God's grace, God's peace and justice in and through us.

- In what ways can you listen more carefully to God's message of peace and justice?
- How do you experience love and truth meeting, and righteousness and peace 'kissing' in your own life?
- How can you open your life even more to allow God's word to take root in your soul this Advent?



**Prayer:** As you speak your words of peace, O God, may they settle into my heart. As you speak your words of love and justice, may they become the rhythm to which my life moves. And as you speak to me, O God, may your words also be heard through me. In Jesus name. AMEN.

## FIRST FRIDAY OF ADVENT



### Jeremiah 4: 1-10

#### Reflection:

Jeremiah was a young man called by God to be a prophet. At his call, God assured him that God had known him and called him since before he was born. His life was no accident – it was shaped by God for a purpose. We see the same truth at work in all of God's servants throughout the Scriptures, right up to John the Baptist. As the old saying goes, when God calls, God also equips.

There is a challenge here for every Christ-follower. As we reflect on our lives, we can see the gifts and abilities that God

has built into us, and we can, if we so choose, seek to use them for God's purposes - as our unique way of speaking God's message of love and justice.

- What are the gifts which you have already offered to God, and how is God using them?
- What gifts have you still not given to God's purposes?
- Are there any ways you can allow your abilities to be used more to speak God's gracious message in your world?
- Why not pick one to focus on today?



**Prayer:** You know me so well, O God – after all, you formed me and placed within me the unique combination of gifts and traits that make up who I am. Help me now to honour you by using my gifts to speak – in word and action – the gracious, life-giving message of your reign, in whatever small ways I can. In Jesus name. AMEN

## FIRST SATURDAY OF ADVENT



**Mark 11: 27-33**

### **Reflection:**

There will always be those who want to control God's work in God's people. There will always be those who challenge the work that God is doing. Many of these resisters will be those who believe that they speak in God's name, and it can be tough to stay faithful to the vision of God's reign in the face of this opposition. Jesus knew what this felt like, but as he was challenged on the question of authority, he pointed to John. The religious leaders, although they had not taken John's message to heart, knew what an impact he had, and how strong his following had been, and they could not risk the displeasure of the people. So, they give Jesus a lame answer which entitles Jesus to refuse to answer their question of his own authority. It was a confident Jesus, secure in his message and mission, that could do this.

For us the challenge of this story is two-fold. Firstly, we need to ask ourselves, like the religious leaders, whether we accept the authority of John's and Jesus' message. This is not just about an intellectual idea that we agree with. It's about how we will orient our lives – will we allow God's reign to be the defining force for us? Then, secondly, we are challenged to stand along with Jesus in the confidence that God's reign gives us as we seek to bring God's grace, peace, love and justice into our world.

- Where could you use a little more of God's confidence as you seek to follow Christ?
- In what ways can your life embody the message of God's reign a little more?
- How can you open your heart to God's presence today, so that God can inspire and empower you?



**Prayer:** It's a scary thing to be asked to follow you, Jesus. Sometimes my love for you brings me into confrontations with others who don't embrace your values, or don't believe in your ways. Sometimes people accuse me of doing things I have no right to, or they claim I'm in over my head – and sometimes they may even be right! But all I want to do is follow you, Jesus, and live out, in my small way, the principles of your reign. Keep me strong and faithful, Jesus, and please let your grace and truth be seen in me. AMEN.