

Advent begins today – the season is purple – so who can guess my sermon for you today?

Maybe it will be to do with this – you’ve all been given – good guess!

Maybe its all apocalyptic – or about watching and waiting – maybe about not being like those frivolous early Christmas celebrators and save our carols for later?

Maybe you think I’m going to give you another sermon on being awake – being woke...

Well... advent is the serious colour and yes - we should be doing holy things

Advent in church feels totally out of synch with the rest of the world and dare I say – me – I can’t lie I am also running around with Christmas playlists and sparkly things eating lots of carbs and being frivolous – yes and we’re not even in December – the horror!

I find the season of Advent difficult in some ways because I find myself joining in with the fun but feeling guilty knowing it isn’t yet time – a bit like I’ve naughtily opened all the advent calendar windows as soon as I get an advent calendar.

I find myself confused – am I serious or jolly at the moment?

Hilariously C of E twitter has not let me down by debating this very question – is it ok to put your tree up before Christmas Eve? – as expected there was a big old barny about this one – I noticed many sniffy comments about those who jump ahead and sing carols before the advent carols... and many who were tinsel lovers declaring that we shouldn’t be a killjoy!

I think I am somewhere in the middle – I think its possible to be in both camps – opting out completely of the vibe around us seems silly – we’re surely missing out and making ourselves look pointlessly miserable -

But we do have churchy advent work to do.

Lent – our other purple season – does seem easier to me – beginning with ash Wednesday rather than candle lighting fasting and just a serious one from the get go – we know where we are – although to be fair I expect to see easter eggs in the coop in the week after Christmas – but generally – it’s a bit less festive till we get there!

So what can we learn from our Gospel today – it speaks of the coming of our Lord:

But about that day and hour no one knows, neither the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. Then two will be in the field; one will be taken and one will be left. Keep awake therefore, for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming. But understand this: if the owner of the house had known in what part of the night the thief was coming, he would have stayed awake and would not have let his house be broken into. Therefore you must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an unexpected hour.

So, the church doesn’t give us the angel coming to Mary – or anything obviously Christmas story related – ah no – it gives us – let me paraphrase this - the threat of Jesus kidnapping someone at work and then the threat of breaking into our house and robbing us.

Be ready. That’s the message!

During this season of Advent we talk a lot about staying awake – of waiting – of being ready.

But the thing this text talks about first – interestingly – is not knowing. But about that day and hour no one knows... uncertainty. Uncertainty is the thing.

I'm not sure if you are like me – but I love certainty – I love to know what will happen – I want to know – will England win their next game before they've even started. Will I eat chips for dinner later tonight! Will there be any eggs in the coop later. I'm terrible at surprises – I get stressed not knowing... but not knowing and uncertainty is the thing in this gospel – it is the thing for advent.

So what is good about being uncertain –

At the beginning of the sermon I asked you what you thought I'd be saying – I guess if you already knew – you might have not bothered to come and listen - if we don't know – we are ready to find out – to be open - to learn...

Be ready. Its very easy to confuse being ready as being the same as knowing what to look for.

If we think we know what to look for – we miss what we were meant to find.

Jesus says be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an unexpected hour.

Maybe just maybe being awake and alert and expectant has nothing to do with knowing and certainty, and has a lot to do with being in a state of un-knowing?

Perhaps spiritually not-knowing is what being ready for Jesus really looks like.

And maybe to me that's a little scary. Because I like to know...

Like the house owner, knowing what to look for -- as a way of avoiding being robbed -- is only advantageous if we assume being robbed is a bad thing. Which is obviously what you first think – no one wants to be robbed – we wouldn't think...

But maybe Jesus breaking in is what we want – and being taken unaware by the grace of God which might be like a thief in the night.

When we actually don't know what to look for, everything that happens to us is the unexpected.

In this season of levels of consumption in which many go into debt or pile on the pounds or just basically aim to have too much of everything – perhaps the idea that Jesus wants to break in and take some of our stuff is actually really good news.

What do you want Jesus to take from you?

Our misery, or loneliness, or self-loathing, or guilt, or resentment ... take those...

So my surprise to you is – not much of a surprise because you've already seen it – is our very own St Swithun's Advent Calendar...

It is a prayer and action calendar – a way to surprise you with God's grace – which might take away something – actually suggest you get rid of things sometimes – time and resources and effort – to give you surprising grace.

Don't make it a torture – but try to be surprised by it – do it as families – or on your own – share on the church whatsapp... do one a week or every single one – don't give up if you miss a day – its not a streak! We're not snapchat or wordle or duolingo!

The main thing is – this Advent – while you enjoy being ready for Christmas in the usual tree decorating way – do some Advent – praying and acting. Allow Jesus to break in – and take something – be surprised and sit with the not knowing and be open to what you don't yet know...

May you be ready for Jesus to break in this Christmas.

Amen