

First Sunday in Advent

Sermon for the Parish of South Darebin, 1 December 2024

by the Reverend Dr Linda Fiske, Vicar

Luke 21: 25–38

Today's gospel encourages us to reconsider our relationship to time. For those of us who become stressed by the To Do list, there never seems to be enough of it!

Jesus in Luke 21 reminds his followers that God is not constrained by the *chronos* time represented by calendar and clock, the sort of time that keeps everything from happening at once. In God's *Kairos* time, past and future are woven together. God's time is the 'now but not-yet'. That time holds the potential to reshape the world's present expectations – and our own. This is essentially a conundrum!

I talked last week of the need to develop our spiritual eyes: the capacity to move beyond everyday vision to a much deeper place. Today I am going to talk about the intersection of the eternal or spiritual world with the everyday world. Spiritual time has a different quality, but we have to work at putting ourselves there. Hold that thought.

Last week I spoke of oral and aural learners, visual and kinaesthetic paths to making information our own. Today I'll introduce another thought and that is the realm of psyche or spirit. Jung uses the word *psyche* to denote Soul. We all experience aspects of soul at times. But it is elusive.

You and I have a body, but we are not our body. We have a mind, but we are not our mind. We are of the world of Spirit which is an amalgam of both body and mind, but much bigger.

The world of Soul is personal. This explains why we are so different in the way we embrace our church experience and the way that we like to worship. I may well have irritated the heck out of you already, but I need beauty in ritual and symbols to push me out of my head and rational thinking. You could talk to me all day long in terms of facts and figures, but until I enter the mystery of spirit, psyche or soul, I haven't been moved. Music, poetry and symbol call me into sacred time. What is it that gets you going?

This may seem like a frivolous theme but just look at the impact that the celebration of Halloween has had in our community. The term is a contraction of All Hallows E'en or evening a religious celebration of All Saints. This once religious festival has lost its roots. The embrace of this commercial event indicates how people hunger for experiences of soul or psyche. So, as we celebrate the beginning of Advent we are called to focus on sacred spiritual time and to step back from the materialistic pressure and the madness of Christmas preparation.

Shortly before his death, Jesus revealed how to know when the kingdom of God is near:

There will be signs in the sun the moon and the stars, and on the earth distress among nations confused by the roaring of the sea and the waves ... the powers of the heavens will be shaken. (Luke 21: 25, 26b)

So even during earth-rending moments, God is near.

Immediately obvious in the gospel passage are the many references to the future. There *will be* signs (Luke 21: 25) causing people to fear *what is coming* upon the world (v. 26). People *will see* the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and glory (v. 27). Heaven and earth *will pass away*, but my words *will not pass away* (v. 33).

Every year when I hear these words I pause to look at the world, and conclude that we are in a mess! So what should we take from this ancient text?

In the immediate historical context, Jesus was speaking to ‘all the people’ (Luke 20: 45; 21: 38) of a promise to be fulfilled on the other side of devastating events about to unfold. Luke’s gospel was written a generation or two after the destruction of the Temple (Luke 21: 20–24). But this message is for us here and now as well. Jesus’ death has redeemed us but we await a future coming. This is the theme of Advent – waiting in hope. This is the strange complexity of living past and present together: the now and the not yet. We are not called to the attitude of Doomsday cults, or to be the preppers of bunkers to survive nuclear fallout. We are called to watchful living.

The Apocalyptic theme we visit each Advent echoes the words from the book of Daniel and echoes Isaiah’s prophecy against Babylon, when God promises to:

... make the heavens tremble, and earth will be shaken out of its place, at the wrath of the Lord of hosts in the day of his fierce anger. (Isaiah 13: 13)

But, there is hope in the imagery of the parable of ‘the fig tree and all the trees’. When buds appear on barren trees we know that the season is changing and new life is present. So what do we take from these themes?

Apocalyptic vision shared by Jesus tells us that in the face of devastation – whether it is caused by nature’s fury or by human stupidity – the reign of God will not be impeded.

So while secular time tells us to buy more in this season, sacred time calls us to be aware of our end on both a cosmic and personal scale. None of us knows when and how that will transpire. What should we do until the messiah comes? We are called to a participatory role! I wonder what that is for you. Is your focus on a global scale working for refugees or climate change? Is it on a domestic scale or perhaps a new role in the church? We are all called to work at the spiritual level of psyche or soul.

We live in the in-between time. God came into the world in the form of a helpless babe in Bethlehem. Today’s gospel verses serve as the hinge between Jesus’ teaching and his passion – and the coming of Christ in glory at the end of time and his triumph over all the powers of earth and heaven.

We have a foot in two places – the now of secular time and the utter joy of spiritual time. We may be frustrated at times by aspects of life that seem Godless, but we can hold fast to spiritual time because we know the end of the story.

God is with us now. Come, Emanuel!

Amen