

Watch

Isaiah 2:1-5; Matthew 24:36-44

If you travel by train today, it's hard not to hear the security message about unattended packages. 'If you see something that doesn't look right, speak to a train staff member. See it. Say it. Sorted.' It's a challenge to all of us to be vigilant and to be concerned not only about our own safety but about the safety of those around us. "See it. Say it. Sorted."

As I read news reports about the state of our nation in this time of General Election, I wonder how that slogan would apply to the politics of our times. "See it. Say it. Sorted." It's hard not to see what is going on in our country and has been going on for some years. The more politicians speak about their vision for the future, the more the public seem to disengage from the political process. A vox pop on Radio Four in Cardiff on Friday revealed a bewildering and frightening array of responses to the issues politicians tell us are of greatest concern. Some expressed deep distrust of all politicians from every party; others expressed concern about when, how or if Brexit should get done, whatever that means. Others were concerned about the future of the NHS. At least two had no idea when then the General Election was taking place. Speaking to friends who cover the gamut of political opinion I have never known such a time of anxiety and anger at the political state of our nation. Many have an idea of what issues need to be addressed. But few have any confidence in any political party, and particularly party leaders, to deliver answers to the most pressing questions of the day. In one televised debate when politicians talked about the need to trust, the laughter from the audience was a clear indication about what people thought about the possibility of trusting any politician.

"See it. Say it. Sorted." Watch.

It's uncomfortable because we know that seeing something and saying something isn't the same as sorting something. It takes more. It takes preparation. It takes commitment. It takes sustained, long-term action, and it takes the courage to adapt and evolve, and sometimes to wait.

That's true in the worlds of politics, economics, business and social care. It's true in the Church also. Quick, snappy slogans will not get things done speedily. We have to decide. We have to commit. We have to work out what, and how, and who, and where and why. Sometimes we have to have the courage to wait. We have to be the change we want to see in every part of God's Kingdom.

I have grown over the years to appreciate the season of Advent, these four weeks that lead us to Christmas. Typically for many on the 1st December, a congregation already has Christmas on its mind and is tilting towards December 25th. Hanging the decorations, decking the halls and already carolling Christmas seems high on the list of expectations.

Our reading this morning will sit uncomfortably with us if we want to disappear into that cosy perception of Christmas. For here we read about the reasons why God in Jesus needs to come into the world, and why we must be ready and waiting, working and watching. The world is broken, flooded by greed and selfishness. The obscenity of 'Black Friday', with its many false promises of savings and urging people to fill the aching emptiness of their lives with the purchase of goods they often don't need. The words and actions of **some** world leaders, and **some** politicians, that have brought anxiety and unease into the world rather than seeking peace and unity; who promise to find money to spend after enforcing years of austerity; building walls of exclusion that shut out the poor and the needy; ignoring the fragility of creation and only now, suddenly, promising the planting of millions, billions of trees; prevaricating on promises to build affordable housing; unable not only to apologise for but to root out language and actions that are antisemitic, Islamophobic, or in other ways belittle and degrade the strangers and minorities in our midst; making promises about funding the NHS, for finding doctors and nurses, for supporting the Police force; promises which few find easy to believe given past experience; wanting to be part of a bigger world and family of nations, when seeking to break up that family in Europe, or the United Kingdom. See what? Say what? Sort what? Watch! What have they, whatever party they belong to, what have they been doing all these years that all of a sudden,

these great remedies must now need be applied to our nation? And what has our part been in that?

And what of our Church? When we look at the plight the Church is in, what have we been doing, or allowing to happen, or colluding with, that has led us to where we find ourselves today. Watch!

Now is not the time to escape into the cosiness of imagined Christmas. Now is the time to stand in the icy blast of Advent, and tremble and wonder about what is going to happen to our world and wonder what we might do to play our part in reordering our hearts and minds and souls. Now is the time for that long hard look at who and what we have become, and not to be surprised that we find ourselves, again, on the edge of a precipice, in the world, and in the Church. Watch!

It is for a time such as this that our Advent readings come, to remind us that into a world such as this the Christ-child comes, to remind us of the God Who chooses to be with us, again and again. And when we drift, and when we lose the way, and when we mess up, and when we break our promises, and when we settle for half-truths and weasel words, we are reminded that the Son of Man comes at an unexpected hour. Watch!

Despite this, now is not the time to despair. Now is the time to hope. Today's Advent message, today's sharing of the Lord's Supper, calls us away from historical and present-day anxiety. We watch, in these anxious and angry times, but still we dare to hope. And we dare to hope because we are not alone. We are with each other, and that counts for something. And we are with Jesus, and that give us hope. In this present age of worrying and waiting, of wondering and longing, we are not expected to know everything, but we are expected to do something. The time for God's decisive action is in the future, Jesus reminds us that we are to keep our attention on the present day and the needs of the present hour. In the world in which we live, this region of the mundane, is where faithfulness happens, and it is not to be neglected. We cannot know everything, we cannot fix everything, but we are called to do something in the here and now. Whatever else Christians may be, we are a work force in the world, for good. Is there

something good you are able to do? Are you able to do it? When will you do it? Let that be what Advent is for you this year: getting on with what you can do, and watching for the signs of the coming of Jesus, which continue to be all around us. We live in hope, we work in hope, for this is our faith, and this is the good news of Jesus on the horizon.

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit

Amen