

THE PROMISES OF GOD – 27 November 2022

Are we there yet!?

Mardie and I have just completed a journey to the far North of NSW and back – a journey of some 4,000 kms! Now I am sure we both felt like asking many times that typical travel question – ARE WE THERE YET!?! Of course, when we were very young and went on a long trip with our parents, we blurted it out with monotonous regularity – ‘ARE WE THERE YET?’.

There is even a children’s book about a family travelling around Australia called ‘Are we there yet!?’ I am sure you have all asked this question many times: ARE WE THERE YET?

And then you, the parent, say to your kids, ‘no!’ ‘Sorry, not there yet, but in the meantime let’s play a game of “I spy with my little eye, something beginning with ‘T’ and it is outside the car.”

And then finally, when you actually do arrive at your destination, the question is answered with a resounding ‘YES!’ and there issues forth lots of cheering and celebration and running down to the beach or to favourite trees to climb or settling in to read the next 6 books in the murder mystery series that has you enthralled etc, etc, etc!

Today is the first Sunday in Advent, the beginning of the Christian Year, and it too, is about a journey, or at least, the beginning of a journey.

But before we do some unpacking of this Advent Journey, let me make one point very firmly about Advent. It is NOT just, in fact, NOT PRIMARILY about pre-Christmas preparations, which is what I think it is often understood to be.

So, what is Advent, then? Let me quote from the Uniting Church’s Revised Common Lectionary, about the meaning of Advent

‘Advent comes from the Latin word ‘adventus’ meaning ‘Coming.’ This 4 week season before Christmas has been set aside as a time of preparation since the 6th century. Advent is a time for preparing for Christ’s second coming, even as we remember and celebrate his first coming at Christmas.’

Let me repeat that last sentence

Advent is a time for preparing for Christ’s second coming, even as we remember and celebrate his first coming at Christmas.

And, just as for those long car journeys, there are three aspects to this all-important journey of the Christian, which begins with ADVENT.

1. First, it IS about a destination. It is about setting our sights on our ultimate destination as Christians. Advent is not just about us waiting for the birth of God on earth BUT is about the coming of the resurrected one (the Second Coming as it is often called). HOW COMMITTED ARE WE TO **THIS** CHRISTIAN DESTINATION, because God is!?

Is it a destination we yearn for and are truly devoted to – a destination above all others in our life? A destination with which we will faithfully engage?

Just last week, the last Sunday of the previous Christian Year we reflected on this destination. The Lectionary calls it, ‘Christ the King’ Sunday.

Our final destination is the Kingdom – the realm of God – where God is our one and only King, Regent and Ruler. And according to the Promises of God, this Kingdom, this Holy Destination, has all the beautiful trees we could ever imagine, to run to and yes, climb, no more crook knees and hips there; in God’s Kingdom we will be able to climb them AND visit all our favourite beaches to swim and luxuriate in; AND the list of wonder, beauty, hope, peace, joy, life and love is endless in this destination – God’s Kingdom. Beats all those expensive resorts we dream about!

In the final chapters of the book of Revelation, John shares his vision about this destination – let me share some of it.

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. ²And I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. ³And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “See, the home of God is among mortals. He will dwell with them as their God; they will be his peoples, and God himself will be with them; ⁴he will wipe every tear from their eyes. Death will be no more; mourning and crying and pain will be no more, for the first things have passed away.” ⁵And the one who was seated on the throne said, “See, I am making all things new.” Also he said, “Write this, for these words are trustworthy and true.” ⁶Then he said to me, “It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. (Rev 21:1-6)

2. Secondly, Advent is about OUR PREPARATION FOR THE JOURNEY, including a bit of route planning and where and when and why and how we might travel. The readings today are full of what it takes to prepare for this journey.

To focus on our Kingdom destination we are called to be peacemakers (Isaiah and the Psalm), to work for justice, decency, uprightness, honesty; ‘putting on the armour of light’ and ‘putting on the Lord Jesus Christ,’ (Romans) and in the reading from Matthew there is a call to urgency in terms of our preparations (³⁶“But about that day and hour no one knows, neither the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father.)

Rev Dr Anita Monro, the Principal of Grace College in the University of Queensland in her commentary in WLTTW suggests an even more important element in our preparation for his coming. I quote

‘The hope of the vision of God’s realm, fully realised, should never be a threat, IT IS A PROMISE. We are called to live out of and towards that promise.’

‘God’s realm is a promise, not a judgement or a threat – WE ARE CALLED TO LIVE OUT OF AND TOWARDS THAT PROMISE’. We are called to approach it with enthusiasm and hope, to see it as an opportunity rather than a high hurdle to be negotiated.

3. Thirdly ADVENT is also about GETTING THERE – THE ACTUAL JOURNEY. And a major element of that is: WHO ARE OUR TRAVELLING COMPANIONS on the way there? Much could be said about this, but I’ll mention just two matters
 - a. Jesus calls us into his community, the Church. Why? Because God wants us to build his Kingdom? No, of course not – that is impossible (more on that in a

moment). This community – OUC for example – is critical in God’s plan – in God’s destination. We are called into this community to live as his Gospel people, people connected by his love; to worship and care and enable and support and love those here and those beyond on our way to the Kingdom.

We are Good-News-Kingdom people, precisely because God calls us to be that – that’s all! We live humbly under the grace and love of God together, on the journey to his REALM.

- b. BUT, the travelling companion who truly matters, is Jesus himself. It is he who reveals the promises of God to all his children on the way to the Kingdom. Those promises?
 - i. Jesus has travelled before us to the Kingdom by way of the cross and resurrection and new life – the first.
 - ii. And through that journey of the cross and the resurrection and by means of God’s Amazing Grace, he has already established the Kingdom of God on earth for all God’s children!!!! Yes – that’s the promise!
 - iii. Furthermore, he travels with us now, in the time between the present and the final consummation of the Kingdom of God.

Please don’t ask me to explain these promises, because not I, nor any of us can ever fully explain these mysteries of the faith – but they are God’s promises to all his children. We read of them widely in the biblical witness.

Let me conclude.

God is screaming God’s good news to us if we have the eyes and ears of faith to see and hear – Surely he is saying to us: ‘live in and through and with and like Jesus, NOW! and in the blink of an eye – that’s God’s eye – the Kingdom will come on earth as it is in heaven. I promise,’ says God.

I finish with a marvellous quotation from Eugene Boring, a prominent Matthean Scholar:

‘We are called to be agnostics about the time of Jesus’ return. We simply do not know. What we do know is what we are supposed to be doing in the meantime....the deeds of mercy, forgiveness, and peace that characterize kingdom people.’

Come, Lord Jesus, Come!

Amen