**SERMON 27TH NOVEMBER 2022 FIRST SUNDAY IN ADVENT**

Today is the first Sunday in Advent. The start of the church’s year. In church it is a period of prayer and reflection as we prepare ourselves for the birth of Jesus. It is also a time when we prepare for the important church services next month. A couple of weeks ago I met with Paul and we talked about the Carol and Christingle service . Pat is planning the Christmas All Age Worship on December 11t. Away from church there are presents to be bought, cards to be written, cakes and puddings to be made. It’s a busy time and it helps to know exactly how long we have before Christmas Day arrives. The media don’t leave us in any doubt and seem to begin the countdown earlier and earlier each year. And no matter what happens, a pandemic, a war, a new King, or Prime Minister we can be sure that the 25th of December will be Christmas Day.

But the Gospel and the Epistle this morning talk about an event which we know is coming but have no idea when it might happen. The second coming of Christ. So ,how do we prepare for that?

I had to smile when I read the reference to being ready for the thief in the night. Am I the only one who tidies the house before we go on holiday ready for the burglars just in case we are broken into while we are away?

‘Be alert ‘Jesus tells us. ‘Wake up’ says Paul in his letter to the Romans. ‘Be ready, walk in the light’

Paul warns the Romans about their behaviour, urging them to be on their guard against immoral living and evil deeds.

When I was a little girl playing with my little sister sometimes things would get a bit wild, too much running around, too much giggling, too much larking about. I can remember my mum trying to calm us down shaking her head saying ‘this will end in tears’ and she was usually right!

My sister and I thought she was just trying to spoil our fun, but what she was really saying was ,‘take care’ and she was saying that because she loved us and didn’t want us to get hurt.

I think that there is something of my Mum’s warning in the words of Jesus that we heard from Matthew. In our world today things are getting out of hand. Our values and priorities are all wrong and although Jesus doesn’t want to stop us from experiencing the joy of this life, because He loves us He wants us to be careful and watch out for anything that will keep us from His Father..

Unlike being burgled Jesus’ return will be a good thing, a day of great joy . Living with an awareness that it will happen is not meant to make us nervous or have sleepless nights. We are told that right up until that day we will be living our lives as normal. We don’t need to give up our jobs or stop having fun just in case it is today. But it does mean that we need to become more faithful and take care.

So, what does taking care mean for all of us? Perhaps it simply means take good care of yourself. Do you need to look after yourself a bit more? Perhaps taking care means taking a good look at what you are doing, allowing your life to get into a better balance, honouring the best qualities you have and using them to do God’s will. Perhaps it’s a warning to be on your guard about something you are involved in that doesn’t feel right for you? Do you simply need to allow yourself some breathing space, or are you in danger of getting so caught up in the materialistic world that you are losing sight of what really counts? Take care. We are all precious in God’s eyes and God loves us. He wants us all to be ready to join Him when we are called.

I have struggled a bit with the lines that say some will be taken and some will be left. It has always conjured up a disturbing picture of a sort of supernatural event where one person is beamed up like something off Star Trek and another person is left behind. I am not sure what Jesus meant by this. One in the field, he says and another at the mill. Well these would be everyday occupations and I’m guessing that he uses them to illustrate that we will indeed be going about our normal work on the Day of Judgement. He also knows that not everyone shares our faith. Religion continues to cause rifts between families , between colleagues and between friends. Well, I don’t want anyone to be left in the field and I don’t think God does either. So maybe while we are taking care of ourselves we are called to take care of others too. Loving and serving God means loving and serving our neighbour not just physically with our good deeds,but also spiritually, not just feeding them food and love but also feeding them with faith through Gods word so that they too can come to believe and enjoy the good things that are promised in this world and be ready for the next.

If you aren’t ready for Christmas the worst that can happen is someone goes without a present, you run out of bread or there isn’t enough turkey to go round. But as we get caught up in busying ourselves to be ready for the 25th December we must remember to take care of ourselves and others so that we can all be ready for that other day on which Jesus returns to judge the world . Amen