

1st Reading: Romans 13:11-14(p1076)

¹¹ And do this, understanding the present time: The hour has already come for you to wake up from your slumber, because our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed. ¹² The night is nearly over; the day is almost here. So let us put aside the deeds of darkness and **put on the armor of light.** ¹³ Let us behave decently, as in the daytime, not in carousing and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and debauchery, not in dissension and jealousy. ¹⁴ **Rather, clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ,** and do not think about how to gratify the desires of the flesh. ^[c]

2nd Reading: Matthew 24:36-44 (p940) ³⁶ “But about that day or hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, ^[f] but only the Father. ³⁷ As it was in the days of Noah, so it will be at the coming of the Son of Man. ³⁸ For in the days before the flood, people were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, up to the day Noah entered the ark; ³⁹ and they knew nothing about what would happen until the flood came and took them all away. That is how it will be at the coming of the Son of Man. ⁴⁰ Two men will be in the field; one will be taken and the other left. ⁴¹ Two women will be grinding with a hand mill; one will be taken and the other left. ⁴² “Therefore keep watch, because you do not know on what day your Lord will come. ⁴³ But understand this: If the owner of the house had known at what time of night the thief was coming, he would have kept watch and would not have let his house be broken into. ⁴⁴ **So you also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him.**

Good morning. May I first of all wish you all a very **happy new year**? That’s what it is. Advent Sunday is New Year’s Day. All our ministerial and church warden diaries etc lectionaries start today.

Chinese wise we are in the year of the **Tiger**. Next year begins on Feb 3rd and is the year of the **rabbit**. There is a cycle of 12 animals. The CE is less imaginative. It has a three year cycle named **A B C**. Year C has just ended and we move to A. Importantly throughout Year A most of our Sunday gospel readings will be from **Matthew**, the first Gospel. We saw that today.

I wonder what you thought of our Gospel reading. **P 940** (helpful to have both readings open) **“Therefore keep watch, because you do not know on what day your Lord will come** It seems to be about the **second coming** of Jesus, his promised return. But isn’t Advent the run up to Christmas, the nativity, the incarnation birth of our saviour? Well yes of course it is and our candles remind us of that over 4 weeks. But Advent is also about the **second coming or parousia** as it is sometimes called.

Like when we say Christ has died, Christ is risen, Christ **will come again** – the so called Mystery of Faith. Or in the creed ‘He will **come again** to Judge the living and the dead.’ Advent covers both comings – we look back to the first; we look forward in hope to the second. Sometimes the first candle is called **the hope** candle.

It is that aspect of advent that we focus on with our readings today.

Matthew is vivid. He doesn't say when:

"Therefore keep watch, because you **do not know** on what day your Lord will come.⁴³ But understand this: If the owner of the house had known at what time of night the thief was coming, he would have kept watch and would not have let his house be broken into.

It will be '**unexpected**'. Hence the need to be in a state of constant readiness:

So you also must be **ready**, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him.

The burglary analogy is clear. You come back from holiday and your home is broken into. You say I wish.....

- I'd fitted better locks and windows, an alarm even
- Told the neighbours
- Set up one of those shadow making things that show people walking around

So Matthew says we must think the same way in respect of our Lord's return. **What if he came now? Are we ready?** Prepared? Unashamed? Or would regret not being properly and respectfully at a **peak of readiness**.

Perhaps that's an unachievable ideal, **but can we try to get somewhere close?**

Paul is helpful in addressing the same idea in his letter to Rome put on the armor of light.¹⁴ **Rather, clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ,**

What a phrase that is **clothe yourself with Christ**. But what might it mean?

It is clear that partly it's about **living ethically**:

Let us behave decently, as in the daytime, not in carousing and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and debauchery, not in dissension and jealousy.

The church in Rome sounds a challenging place! Paul used the same image writing to the church in Colossae. '**Clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, patience.**' Ethical living if you like.

But Clothing with Christ takes ethical living to a higher level.

On Wednesday after Alpha I was talking to Simom about clothing. Simon is out in the open for 2 weeks in Yorkshire. Nice weather for it. Sleeping in a tent? No. bivouac with maybe a tarpaulin overhead slung between trees. How do you keep warm and dry? Simon said it's all about **clothing layers** to give warmth and dryth. It's about clothing oneself properly with sufficient **layers**.

I want to suggest some Advent layers that might equate to Clothing oneself with Christ. These layers are in no particular order!

1. **Give.** Be generous, compassionate towards those in far greater need. I can help you here. Today we launch our Advent mission boxes, collecting for the work of BibleLands. Christians and indeed Muslims in for example the occupied West Bank face terrible hardship. Biblelands does a tremendous job supporting them. Take a box, leave it around for all comers to contribute. 10-15 per box gives £500. They're at the back. **Give**
2. **Read.** God's Word is our starting point. Another layer. Why not this advent, this December **read Matthew**. The gospel for the year ahead. 28 chapters that's one a day roughly. As we read God's word he speaks to us.
3. **Pray.** But then Pray. Give more time to prayer this advent. **ACTS** is maybe a good way – Nicky Gumble from Alpha
 - **Adoration**
 - **Confession**
 - **Thankyou**
 - **Supplication**
 - Praise, sorry, thankyou, ask
 - It avoids a purely shopping list approach.
 and in that include anything that has occurred to you in the reading. A further way to meet 1 and 2 is to go onto the Living God's Love website this Advent. The address is in PN.
4. **Tell.** Have you ever said or had it said to you 'what was the last thing I said to you?' What was the last thing Jesus said to us, his disciples? Look at the end of Matthew's gospel **Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in^[a] the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,²⁰ and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.** Making new disciples is another of Bp Alan's aims. We call it **evangelism**. Goodnewsing. To do this we obey Jesus and tell others. Maybe a good and easy way is to invite people to our Christmas services, the carol services, family service on Christmas day, Crib, Christingle. Do evangelism.

So the way to improve our state of readiness is to **clothe ourselves with Christ**.

And we might do that via these 5 suggested ways:

- **Living Ethically**, compassionately, humbly
- **Giving Generously** eg to BL
- **Reading God's Word**, eg Matthew's Gospel this advent
- **Praying Regularly** and in a more structured way
- **Telling Others**, maybe using our Advent service programme to help.

It's in PN!