

2019 December sermon

Isaiah 2:1-5, Ps 122, Romans 13:9-14, Matt 24:36-44

Are we there yet? This is the slogan on my 4-year-old grandson's T-shirt, which he often wears on long trips.

Are we there yet? How many times have we heard that question, or even asked it ourselves, though perhaps under our breath?

Are we there yet?

And our Psalm today gives us an answer.

V.2 our feet are standing in your gates, O Jerusalem.

It is a song marking the end of a long trip, a long pilgrimage to Jerusalem, to attend one of the three great annual religious festivals. It was undertaken with a strong sense of tradition, and suddenly we can almost hear the triumphant shout. We've arrived!

Just imagine the excitement as the travellers enter Jerusalem, looking around at all the buildings, doing all the things tourists normally do. They may have been physically tired after their long journey - but emotionally they are exhilarated, sensing God's very presence in the city, with its temple being celebrated as the earthly dwelling place of God.

In those days Jerusalem was also a centre of justice and administration - a divine symbol of peace and security. The psalmist rejoices to be with God's people in God's house, to be part of a loving fellowship of those who worship together, pray together, and seek each others welfare as the people of God. He expresses deep joy over the city and offers a prayer for its peace and prosperity.

In our Old Testament reading today Isaiah builds on this familiar picture of pilgrimage to bring a message of hope to those living in a period of increasing political turbulence. God revealed to him a tantalising vision, a wonderful description of peace. A glimpse into a future time, when the city of Jerusalem will have a universal calling. He foretold that *in the last days* Jerusalem would become the centre of the world, transformed into an ideal destiny. It would not be just the Jewish pilgrims who would go to the temple there, but all nations will want to come and learn justice and righteousness from God himself.

God's instruction will replace international conflict. Instruments of war will be converted into instruments of farming. This will make for peaceful prosperity for all people. There will be a future of unity with everyone working together in complete harmony. A time when we will know God's ways - and we will obey them. The vision of Isaiah gives us too a hope to work towards such a world. And Isaiah urges us to begin that process now.

V.5 Come let us walk in the light of the Lord

But we do not have to wait until the 'last days', as the scripture passage tells us. We can already enjoy many benefits of obedience now as we apply God's words to our lives: living in peace and tolerance within our families, amongst our

friends and neighbours, and in our communities. Global peace is only an enlargement of this.

Jesus too was looking **towards** *the last days*. Matthew tells us in his gospel that Jesus was teaching about his second coming He was answering the disciples' question

V. 3 Tell us when this will happen and what will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?

And yes he will come again

I am coming soon he says in Revelation 22:7

Jesus may come today, tomorrow or centuries in the future – but return he will. He urges us to be alert, to be ready.

He warns those who are listening, including ourselves, that his second coming will be swift and sudden. We will get no advance notice, and incredibly Jesus himself doesn't know when it will happen. There will not be any opportunity for last minute repentance or bargaining. Jesus reminds us that life will be going on as usual when he returns. Most people will continue in their everyday tasks, indifferent to the demands of God.

The life choices that each one of us makes now will determine our eternal destiny. So we must be prepared.

V.42 Therefore keep watch, because you do not know on what day your Lord will come

The early church expected this event at any minute. Paul, in his letter to the Romans, reminded his readers that this should motivate them into living a godly life.

V 11-12 And do this, understanding the present time. The hour has come for you to wake up from your slumber, because our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed. The night is nearly over the day is almost here.

Paul encouraged his fellow believers to outwardly display all the virtues associated with Christ because every day brings his coming closer.

Clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ

He exhorts all Christian people to keep going and to act out of love. If we focus on loving our neighbours everything else will fall into place. Love of our neighbour encompasses all social responsibilities, and as Jesus said, our neighbour is anyone in need.

As we all strive to live in a way that makes for the imminent return of Christ we don't need to be overwhelmed with a list of dos and don'ts. If we clothe ourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ, our behaviour will adapt to our new lifestyle. It helps us to withstand temptation.

So how should we clothe ourselves in Christ?

Back in the 90s, (would you believe it was last century?) back in the 90s there was this slogan WWJD, what would Jesus do. Who remembers this? It was popular especially with younger Christians who would often wear these initials

on a wristband or bracelet. WWJD, What would Jesus do? This became a personal motto – a reminder of the Christian idea to act in a way that would demonstrate the love of Jesus through action.

This is just the same as clothing ourselves in Christ so that people see something of Jesus when they meet us. Above all they should see his love reflected in our lives. But love cannot exist in a vacuum. It can only be known by the actions it prompts. C S Lewis said that Christian love is not a feeling but a state of will which enables us to work for the highest good even of those who may naturally repel us. And don't forget God knows and sees all our actions.

As I said before, the early church expected Jesus to return at any moment but 2000 years later our sense of urgency has somewhat dulled. It is so easy to allow the demands of daily life to preoccupy us, and we face the danger of being distracted or tired of waiting. But we must keep God's promises through Isaiah in mind, a future of peace and hope as all people come together to see the final coming of Jesus and to live in his presence forever.

So let us use this period of Advent to renew our commitment to be ready for Jesus.

To keep alive in our hearts the joy of the Psalmist as we celebrate Jesus coming as a baby Saviour at Christmas and to prepare for his return in glory.

Behold Jesus said I am coming soon. Amen! Come Lord Jesus!