

ADVENT SUNDAY 2020 – Mark 13: 24-37; Isaiah 64: 1-9; I Cor 1: 3-9

'Keep awake'..... 'Watch' 'Be alert'..... (v37,34,33)

This sounds like a Government slogan to keep us safe from the corona-virus doesn't it?! But these are in fact the words of Jesus, as Mark records in our gospel reading today. And I don't know what immediate images or thoughts they evoked in you, but as I read them 2 things instantly came to mind:

Firstly, the many times that I have missed the end of a film, television programme or sporting event because I have failed to stay awake Thank goodness for 'catch-up' and 'rewind'!

My second image was the more sobering memory of when I was driving alone on the M11 about 25 years ago, and suddenly found myself a split second away from careering into the central reservation, having closed my eyes through tiredness and drifted from the inside to the outside lane Thankfully, this moment of not being *awake, alert and watching*, was very brief and happened when it seems there were no other cars around me!

And so I guess for me, these exhortations to 'keep awake', 'watch' and 'be alert', invoke both *opportunity* and *warning* – of the opportunities we may miss out on, and the consequences that may result, if we are *not*, keeping awake, watchful and alert.

When Jesus originally spoke these words they were specific and prophetic to the time. For this whole passage, as with most of chapter 13, is the result of a conversation Jesus is having with His disciples after they have been marvelling at the splendour of the temple in Jerusalem. Using Jewish history and Jewish ideas and imagery that they would understand, Jesus then predicts the fall of Jerusalem and particularly the destruction of the temple (which happened around 40 years later in AD70); adding that they are not to worry about when that day will come but to just make sure they are prepared.

And although particularly relevant at the time, they still continue to be wise words today... Indeed, in the midst of the destruction that we find ourselves in because of the corona virus, I found myself wondering whether this virus could have been less disastrous if more people had *watched* what was happening and been more *alert* at the beginning.....? Similarly, on finding out about how the Oxford vaccine was created, I became very thankful to those scientists who had watched what happened with the Ebola crisis a few years ago and been alert to what could happen in the future, and so began to create a vaccine even then.....

One of the many things we have learnt from all we have experienced through the infliction of Covid this year is that we can't take anything for granted; that our worlds can be turned

upside down at any moment; and our normal way of life can suddenly change without us having any control over it.....

However, there is one constant that will never change..... something we can rely on.....some *One* who promises to always be there with unconditional love for us. It is what we are preparing ourselves for as we begin Advent again this year..... as we prepare to celebrate that moment over 2000 years ago when God met with His creation in a new and wonderful way..... the moment when Love came down at Christmas..... And God's promise of a new creation in which justice, peace, mercy and truth would at last flourish was fulfilled through God's Messiah, Jesus Christ.....

The promise that God invites us all to be part of..... His love working in and through us, as we are also involved in being part of God's love in the world.....seeking justice, showing mercy and grace, forgiveness and compassion.....

'Keep awake'..... 'Watch' 'Be alert'.....words that at the beginning of this sermon I compared to a government slogan intending to keep us safe from the corona virus.

But words that God gives us today – because His desire is also to keep us safe – from ourselves and all that can destroy us – God wants us to flourish, and be free in who we are, and to be part of this new world that Jesus heralded, where love reigns, and justice, peace, mercy and truth flourish.

So as we begin our preparations for Christmas this year – although I know our celebrations will be very different, I pray that God will pour out His Holy Spirit in a new and amazing way that we will all be awake, watching and alert to see and to be part of.

AMEN