

Advent One Sunday 29th November 2015

Notices

Thanks to everyone
STA Prayer day

**Luke 21 The Coming of the Son of Man /
The Lesson of the fig tree / Exhortation to
watch**

**‘Hope amid chaos, green shoots amid
brokenness’**

Introduction

Yesterday was the Christmas Fayre on North Street and we invited people to open an Advent Calendar window and answer the question ‘What does Christmas mean to you?’. There was craft here in church and then shoppers carols. Free refreshments were laid on too.

**Early yesterday I was asked how r u
feeling about today?**

I replied, quietly confident because there's been enough preparation planning and prayer gone into it, now it's up to God. I hope He turns up.

It was Chaos!

The Marquee blew across the street, Phil n Abbey's train was delayed, It was so wet n windy the stall had to be abandoned, the publicity failed to mention the venue, there was almost no advertising of the Shoppers Carols, the photocopier got jammed, car keys were found abandoned, the office became a tip, there were people everywhere - it was chaos – many people including me loved it. Perhaps it wasn't quite the thing for a perfectionist or control freak, but there was a vibe, an atmosphere of goodwill and teamwork.

Chaos is part of life, there was a sense of organic momentum among people of all ages – colouring, gluing, sticking, reading the paper, eating cake, chatting. Chaos suggests 'out of control' but God has created a world in which order was created out of chaos – God looked at his world and saw that it was very good. God created and ordered things in such a way that they can seem out of His control and random – that God is not in fact all powerful, all-knowing and all loving, that Christ is not King. Yet, yesterday there was a beauty about

the network of organic relationships being strengthened. Being family together was and is an untidy business.

Christmas is about family

was the same answer nearly everyone gave at the stall in response to the question, 'What does Christmas mean to you?'. I think God would agree. It's just that God has a much bigger picture of what family means – it's the whole people He created – it's our neighbour our friends it's our congregation but it's also the lost the least and the lonely. God has a heart for bringing together all humanity as His family once more made in His image -

Chaotic / Random Acts of Kindness

Freewill gives reign to random acts, and some of these yesterday were a foretaste of heaven, a glimpse of the kingdom of God. A man on the adjacent donut stall lent us a 5 litre bottle of water to weigh down our marquee and used some rope to tie down another of the legs; the owner of the Savanna coffee shop brought out free coffees for each of us; volunteers were looking after children in the church so others

could focus on their tasks; there was buying of lunch for others; and doubtless other random acts of kindness. Most people are basically decent and the world is wonderful – don't let your hearts be discouraged or your minds be persuaded that it is any different. Kindness is newsworthy but commonplace, beauty is all around us but doesn't fuel gossip.

When planning the event, there was a long list of things to consider

as there is with any event : buying materials, meeting to plan and to pray, designing the layout of the church, thinking about the practicalities, asking Jon to play the organ, checking the Carol Sheets.

We got ourselves ready but

in the end, we needed God to turn up. You see, what will attract people to become part of this congregation and more importantly to become a follower of Jesus is if they encounter God for themselves. If God turns up. We put on events to raise awareness of this house of prayer we call St Francis church yet in the end it's about encountering the living God.

The trouble with Gods plans

are they are carried out by hopelessly flawed people they're disappointing n fiendishly unpredictable often making no sense at all

The Promises of God

are not like earthly promises – can you remember a time when you were promised something and it didn't happen? God's promises are immovable guarantees – when he spoke through the prophet Jeremiah, there was a promise that offspring of King David would reign forever – a righteous branch that will spring up and execute justice and righteousness in the land.

Here's the plan.

The year is 560 BC and Jeremiah says God's got a plan to sort out Israel. What no-one knew then was that it would happen over five hundred years later. God himself would come in flesh and blood as a helpless vulnerable poor illegitimate working class carpenter from a despised rural backwater, then die after three years in public ministry.

There's more, it would happen by virgin birth and this Son of God would be resurrected. Don't make me laugh. What a hopeless pathetic plan.

Looking back at Good Friday the disciples must have thought, 'so that really worked well then'!

Quite when n how God turns up

that's up to Him! Did the dreadful weather mean God hadn't listened – well my prayer if you remember was that He would turn up and what did the weather mean – more people came down the road? Only a few little words like free cake and central heating were enough to attract the bargain hunters!

God turned up in the chaos of a stable in an occupied land

But as Justin Welby ABC asked about the chaos of the bombings in Paris, Where were you then Lord God?

When we see the chaos and struggle

around this uncertain world if we pay attention we can also notice the kingdom of God is breaking in to all manner of situations, like green shoots on the trees. Including in us – we notice that within us our hearts can get downcast, or weighed down. Is that you – weighed down by the troubles of this world? To get too despondent is to doubt that

God is in control, to get too weary of this earthly life is to fail to have Jesus at the centre as our King. There might be random activity but often its in the form of acts of kindness which point us to the Kingdom of God

Even amid the chaos of Paris

There were signs of a different value system, courage, bravery, selflessness, societies reassessing their priorities and it made me hug Jasmine all the tighter when I heard about it. But Jesus commends us to look out for the signs of the ends of the age which includes being alert, standing with confidence to face our maker and notice goodness all around us.

Green Shoots

I see green shoots of Spiritual Growth here in St Francis. More people are coming to bible study, volunteers are popping up all over to get involved in our vision priorities of Mission Spiritual Growth and Pastoral Care. At the shoppers carols yesterday there were 40 people. It was amazing how busy church was in morning. At the Vision day 12 people turned up all eager to do God's work in the world

Like green shoots

that appear on fig trees and other plants, we see growth when the conditions are right.

What are the conditions to introduce people to Jesus? We have the START course to invite people to learn the basics of Christian Faith, we're beginning to get into the habit of praying in meetings, bible study is growing and there are ideas and suggestions of new initiatives we could undertake like a parenting course.

Creating the right conditions

As a church, we are focussing on Spiritual Growth, Mission and Pastoral and at our Vision Day last weekend we put in place a number of exciting new ideas to ensure we create the right climate for green shoots to appear in our lives as disciples: we're having a big roast dinner in February, we're having a Mission meeting to plan events for the year such as the Street Fayres, we're also looking at Pastoral care and how to care for one another more effectively. By preparing by intentionally putting in place these programmes we pray that we will be prepared that our hearts will be turned

towards the hope that we have, that people will come to share in the hope we have – always be prepared to give a reason for the hope that you have – says the bible.

What preparations are we making to meet with Jesus again?

Do you have some questions for him or will you have nothing to say. We won't be in any doubt that Jesus is who he says he is, but when he returns we are to stand up and raise our heads in confidence.

Someone once said, 'some people are so heavenly minded they are no earthly use' – do you agree. Now I think they mean if you over spiritualise everything and never help out practically I would accept that argument. Sometimes our prayer should be in the form of financial or physical help.

But if we have our sights set on heaven and the hope that we have it will impact the way we live our lives now and every day.

We know, don't we?, that Jesus is statistically very unlikely to return again in our lifetime after all, he hasn't in the last two millennia so we're pretty

safe aren't we? Well why would you want to live your life differently to the way of eternal life, to the way of truth and fulfilment and joy and peace. The way of Jesus isn't a cosy crutch it's demanding. We have to wake up and smell the roses, or see the shoots on the fig trees.

Jesus is coming, look busy!!

That was the slogan on a tee-shirt. Is that how you will hastily prepare for the return of Jesus?

We can look forward with confidence

raise up our heads and by being heavenly minded we can be a great deal of earthly use.

What do people need this Christmas

The love of family - to know they are loved by God and by their neighbour by the friends and by the family of God which includes all humanity.

There is hope in the random, there is kindness in the chaos – I pray we all remain alert to the times and places where God turns up in most unexpected ways. By creating the right conditions for encounters with the living God we will continue to see yet more green shoots as we grow

together to me more like Christ, Wonderful Counsellor, Prince of Peace and who bears the full weight of government on his shoulders. The day is coming that will be known as The Lord is our Righteousness!