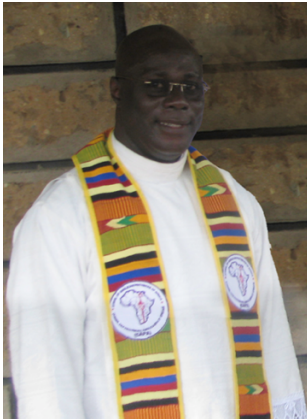


FIRST SUNDAY OF ADVENT

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I am an Anglican Priest of the Diocese of Cape Coast (Ghana) but now serving as the General Secretary of the Council of Anglican Provinces of Africa (CAPA). Committed to furthering the work of God's kingdom through the Anglican Church. Passionate about discipleship and social development as the mission mandate of the Church (Matthew 28:19-20, Luke 4:18-19). A firm believer in the principle that "God's work done in God's method will never lack God's provision".

GOSPEL—MARK 13: 24-37

²⁴"But in those days, after that suffering, the sun will be darkened,

and the moon will not give its light,

²⁵and the stars will be falling from heaven,

and the powers in the heavens will be shaken.

²⁶Then they will see 'the Son of Man coming in clouds' with great power and glory. ²⁷Then he will send out the angels, and gather his elect from the four winds, from the ends of the earth to the ends of heaven.

²⁸"From the fig tree learn its lesson: as soon as its branch becomes tender and puts forth its leaves, you know that summer is near. ²⁹So also, when you see these things taking place, you know that he is near, at the very gates. ³⁰Truly I tell you, this generation will not pass away until all these things have taken place. ³¹Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.

³²"But about that day or hour no one knows, neither the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. ³³Beware, keep alert; for you do not know when the time will come. ³⁴It is like a man going on a journey, when he leaves home and puts his slaves in charge, each with his work, and commands the doorkeeper to be on the watch. ³⁵Therefore, keep awake—for you do not know when the master of the house will come, in the evening, or at midnight, or at cockcrow, or at dawn, ³⁶or else he may find you asleep when he comes suddenly. ³⁷And what I say to you I say to all: Keep awake."

REFLECTION

It is yet another Advent Season, a season in which we remember the Birth of Jesus two thousand years ago in a stable in Bethlehem. But Advent, (derived from the Latin word "adventus" meaning "coming") also reminds us to look forward with great anticipation for the Second Coming of Christ.



GLOBAL PARTNERSHIPS

During this season of preparation, the Church calls on us to spend time in penance, prayer and fasting to prepare for the coming of Christ – His second coming in the clouds as the judge of the world.

Advent does not only mark a time of preparation to remember and celebrate the birth of Christ, the Messiah (the Lamb who takes away the sins of the World) but also a call on us to prepare and look forward for the Second Coming of Christ the Judge.

Advent is not just a liturgical season of the church year. It is a reality of life. It happens in all sort of ways. It comes at various points in life.

Exegesis and Application

As I reflect on the meaning of Advent, I find myself drawn to three ideas in the Gospel passage - ideas that I think are useful to reflect on during Advent.

1. He is coming again

The first of these ideas is that, as we prepare to remember Jesus' coming to this earth two thousand years ago as a baby in Bethlehem - so we must look forward to his Second Coming in glory - one day. This is something special to look forward to.

In verses 26 and 27 of the gospel passage, Jesus, speaking about his Second Coming said,

²⁶"At that time men will see the Son of Man coming in clouds with great power and glory. ²⁷And he will send his angels and gather his elect from the four winds, from the ends of the earth to the ends of the heavens.

The great Christian hope is that CHRIST WILL COME AGAIN and he will usher in a new heaven and a new earth, where there will be no more tears, no more suffering and Jesus will be the light in our midst. (Rev 21 and 22)

Perhaps we should live our lives, all the year round, as an ADVENT preparing for that event.

2. God has work for us to do on earth.

The second of the ideas is that God still has work for us to do on earth.

We are called to live our Christian life in our communities – loving our neighbours as ourselves – sharing the Good News of Jesus Christ with our neighbours.

In our Gospel reading, Jesus had this to say about the time in which we are living – leading up to the Second Coming:

³⁴ It's like a man going away: He leaves his house and puts his servants in charge, each with his assigned task, and tells the one at the door to keep watch. ³⁵Therefore keep watch because you do not know when the owner of the house will come back--whether in the evening, or at



midnight, or when the rooster crows, or at dawn. 36 If he comes suddenly, do not let him find you sleeping.

God has put mankind in charge of this world – and, as the Church, he expects us to fulfil His mission for us here on earth, a mission outlined in the Great Commission:

¹⁸ All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. ¹⁹ Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. (Mt. 28:18-19)

3. Watch, be alert

The final thought that I would like to leave you with - from our Gospel reading on Advent Sunday is that Jesus wants us to be alert. He wants us to be so well schooled in the Scriptures that we cannot be taken in by false prophets.

When I was a young Christian, I was taught to challenge everything I heard from the pulpit. To ask myself the question: Does what is being preached coincide with a reasonable interpretation of Scripture.

Our Gospel passage this Advent Sunday challenges to carefully mull over what we hear from our pulpits over this Christmas period (including the unsaid story of the Infanticide engineered by King Herod and which the Church celebrates as the Feast of the Innocents)

Conclusion

In conclusion, our Gospel reading encourages us to know;

1. that one day Jesus will return in glory and that we are living in the ADVENT of that time
2. that Jesus wants us to go on living as if he was coming tomorrow - to be on RED ALERT. If he came tomorrow, would you be embarrassed by what he would find you doing? and
3. Jesus wants us to be on our guard – against being led astray by false prophets and teachers.



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. How will we find our way forward when the usual lights that illumined our path no longer shine as it happened with the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic?
2. What do we do when it feels as if our world is falling apart as is happening for many of our brothers and sisters affected by the pandemic; as with the many vulnerable members of our communities who have lost livelihoods, have faced adverse impact of Gender-based and Domestic Violence; Children and Girls who have been abused (sometimes by people they trusted)?
3. Where do we go when it seems as if darkness is our only companion and God is nowhere to be seen? How does the Church become the light of the world in very practical ways?
4. How does the Church live in practical diakonia as we build back from the pandemic?
5. What resources has the Lord blessed us by which we can make a difference in the lives of others – both of those with whom we share the same faith and even those with no faith?

