

Sermons for All Saints: the Anglican Church of Luxembourg

Preached by Rev. Geoff Read at the Advent Carol Service 2018

The mantra of house buying, of real estate is: location, location, location

You might say that location is also about our beliefs and values, our world view and all that has shaped our way of seeing and interpreting reality. So, as Abraham Maslow put it in his *The Psychology of Science*, “If all you have is a hammer, everything looks like a nail...”

Current Western perceptions of reality seem to bear this out as so often it seems that the only hammer carried is that of economics and the market

I recently came across these words about location and perception

Walking up and down my cell three paces this way, three paces that way, with my hands in irons and ahead of me an uncertain future, I have a new and different understanding of God's promise of redemption and release.

The Jesuit priest, Father Alfred Delp belonged to a courageous group of Germans committed to building a new way of being when the War finally would come to an end. Imprisoned for defeatism and treason in Plotzenzee Prison he was finally hanged on 2nd February 1945

In that place of “uncertain future” and with the weight of irons on his wrists Delp wrote a meditation called “The Shaking Reality of Advent”.

He saw this Advent season as “a time when we all ought to be shaken and brought to a realisation of ourselves.”

From his location, his perception became one of being shaken: a shaking, a bringing himself and indeed others to their senses in order that he and they might align themselves with God's purposes of bringing in His kingdom, a new world order of justice, love and peace.

Advent – a time when we all ought to be shaken

But so often Advent seems to have disappeared without trace, swallowed by the massive juggernaut of commercial and even Church Christmas

Advent - a time when we ought to be brought to a new realisation of ourselves and of God's great promises of redemption and release

But so often the Advent themes of a fresh perspective on our present and future are overshadowed by the extended backward gaze towards Bethlehem

So, my invitation to you this Advent is: be radically counter-cultural.

Resist the call of Christmas, both commercial and Church, until 24th and allow Advent to do its strange but oh, so necessary work of shaking and of bringing us to a realisation

Our theme of darkness and light may seem to describe in polarised, binary terms the beauty and greatness of God in contrast to the mess and sin of so much of what passes for ordinary life in our world

We see the truth of St John's words about Jesus – in Him, was life, and that life was the light of all people

We also see the truth of the words of that same St John as, in our own lives we do have to own up to the darkness, despite our best endeavours or cover-ups, otherwise if we say we have no sin its only ourselves we are deceiving

But we also know that in-between, in the place that we inhabit, grey is not just a description of something bland or compromised, but actually the place of potential transition and change, the necessary movement from darkness to light

As day moves to night and back to day, those in between grey time of dusk and dawn are ones of purposeful movement and change

The grey times are potentially the place for what Alfred Delp calls “a new and different understanding of God’s promise of redemption and release.”

But that begins with allowing ourselves to be shaken

Allowing for a new realisation to dawn, to emerge

But it is very counter intuitive to allow ourselves to be shaken

Naturally we hang on to what we know, we seek to steady the ship, regain equilibrium

Advent, though, bids us yield and allow ourselves to be shaken by God as we allow His perspective to challenge ours

Trusting that this shaking is part of His good purposes

Allowing Him to take us on a journey that another writer, Sheldon Vanauken, called “a severe mercy”

What is true of individuals is also true of groups, communities, whole societies

What do we make of the shaking today of all that once seemed so secure?

Will we cover our ears, push our heads in the sand, keep calm and carry on

Or will we, as Delp found in his grey cell, allow new and different understandings of God’s promise of redemption and release.

May I invite you to a simple, daily discipline this Advent: prayerful silence

To set aside 5 minutes a day. To find a quiet, undistracted spot and time.

To sit, comfortable but alert, and to say prayerfully those simple words of Jesus: Father, your kingdom come, your will be done

And then to allow that to happen through the radical step of 5 minutes of silence

Everything in you will seek to prevent you being shaken by silence, will scramble to reassert the equilibrium of busyness and achievement: shopping lists, memories and images

When that happens quietly but firmly repeat your words, maybe in time with your breath: Father, your kingdom come, your will be done

Those five minutes probably won’t be the place where the new perception happens. That will be as you actually live life

But they will mark a new, Advent centre of gravity in your life. Not based on achieving but being, not on activity but grace

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