

Mark 13:24-37: Advent

Holy Communion, Advent, 3rd December 2023

It is Advent again! Advent candles, chocolate Advent calendars, getting ready for Christmas. We are looking forward to the birth of Jesus. But, Advent starts rather differently. By some coincidence, this is the third year in a row that I have preached on Advent Sunday. And the readings are always about the end of the world. And it is supposed to be all-age worship...

[*Slide of Man with The End is Nigh placard*] Have you ever seen anything like this in Broad Street? This used to be quite a common site in town centres on a Saturday. This is some people's way of preaching the gospel. Avoid the judgement to come, and turn to God. And you still find people doing this! You may or may not think this is an effective way of winning people for Christ. I do not know of anyone in the congregation who does this.

In the news there are lots of things that can make it feel like the world is coming to an end: fighting and earthquakes and famines, climate change. In the beginning of Mark 13, Jesus tells us to expect such things to happen, but while they point to the end, they are not the end. Which is why we try to help those around the world who are suffering from disasters, and campaign for change.

Jesus' teaching about the end times is difficult to understand. There is no general agreement about which events in the future he is referring to, whether they have happened or are still to come. We have passed lots of predicted dates for the end of the world over the centuries, but, as you can see, they have been wrong. But he is clearly trying to tell us something.

It seems a bit of a gloomy subject. But there is hope here too. This is Advent. The word means 'arrival', and in Advent we look forward to celebrating Jesus' 'arrival' as a baby at Christmas, but also his arrival again in the future. He came at Christmas to show us God, to give us a way to God. His teaching about a Second Coming reminds us that he is still the Lord of all. So, when there is trouble in the world, or when each of us has trouble, his love for us continues.

[*Keep Calm and Carry On poster*] I have a summary of what our reading is about. Well, I think it is roughly this. You probably know that this poster was produced by the government in 1939, just before World War 2, to try and improve morale in case Britain suffered a major attack. But this did not happen early in the war, and the poster was never actually used in earnest. A copy was discovered in 2000 in a bookshop in Alnwick, and it's become a meme in its own right.

[*Keep Calm Variants*] There are a lot of variants of the poster; some are shown here. Most of them are silly, but quite fun.

So, I take this poster here to mean that Keep Calm is an invitation to trust in God. Though the world seems a mess sometimes, God is still behind it. Do not give up. And do not despair, so that you forget God is with us and around us and supporting us, and asking us to care for others. Carry On serving him.

I have an activity for you. It ignores the last poster here (Keep calm and stop making stupid "keep calm and carry on" variations). I would like you to make your own slogan. Like the Keep Calm poster, do this in two parts: what worries you, and what helps you to overcome it. Use the Keep Calm format if you can, but you can stretch it a long way. There are some Post-Its coming round, and some pens and pencils. Think of what you need to keep calm about, what worries you, what does the future hold that you are not looking forward to. And then, what do you do about it? How does having Christ in our present and our future

help? If you do not want to write it down, fine, just sit and think and pray. If you are happy to share what you write I will ask you to bring it forwards in a bit.

For the younger people, there is an alternative. We have put some paper and crayons over on the tables at the back. Draw something that helps you cope with problems, with fears with worries: someone, something. There are some people over there to help.

[*Don't Worry, and Be Ready*] This was my summary of Mark 13 after thinking about it for the week. Jesus is not trying to terrify us. It is more preparation, that he will be there with us, so we do not need to worry. And the future is in his hands, whether we meet him when we die, or whether we see his return on earth, we should be ready. Stay close to him in the way, in our thoughts and prayers and the way we live. Be ready.

Jeremy Thake
St. John & St. Stephen.

DON'T WORRY AND KEEP TRYING	KEEP CALM AND BE MOTIVATED	DON'T WORRY, PRAY, STAY FOCUSED	ENJOY ADVENT THE ADVENTURE	KEEP HOPE AND CARRY ON
KEEP CALM AND BRING YOUR FEARS TO GOD	<i>LOST MY PASSWORD CRY FOR HELP FEELING DOWN RISE ABOVE IT</i>	KEEP PATIENT WHEN WARS SURROUND US. CHRIST IS WITH US.	KEEP CALM AND CUDDLE A SAUSAGE DOG	KEEP CALM AND CARRY ON, ELSE YOU WILL FAIL.
ANALYSE EVERYTHING AND PROCEED WITH CAUTION	DON'T BE SHOCKED JUST KEEP PRAYING AND WAITING	KEEP CALM AND CARRY ON TO THE END OF YOUR JOURNEY	KEEP CLOSE TO GOD. DON'T LET HIM BE PUSHED OUT BY BUSYNESS.	STOP, PAUSE REMEMBER GOD IS WITH ME. I WILL BE OK. AMEN
KEEP CALM AND START DOING SOMETHING ABOUT THE HOUSE. PRAY FOR HELP.	KEEP CALM AND DO THINGS THAT SCARE YOU. (THEN GO HOME AND MAKE A BLANKET FORT.)	ALL SHALL BE WELL AND ALL MANNER OF THINGS SHALL BE WELL	TRUST MY MIND TO TELL ME THE TRUTH. KEEP CALM AND LISTEN TO GOD'S TRUTH.	YOU DON'T KNOW WHAT YOU DON'T KNOW AND THAT IS THE MERCY OF GOD
EAT CHOCOLATE AND PLAN	KEEP CALM AND STREAM. PANIC LATER	GO IN PEACE. GOD WILL NEVER LEAVE US.	KEEP CALM AND GO OUTSIDE MORE	BE STILL AND KNOW THAT I AM GOD
<i>WORRY ABOUT RETIREMENT AND PROVIDING FOR FAMILY LIVE IN THE NOW, TRUST IN GOD'S PROVISION DO MY BIT</i>	<i>FAILING HEALTH WITH AGEING, AND CONCERN FOR OTHERS. GOD IS THE ANSWER.</i>	<i>WAR, CLIMATE CHANGE, DEATH AND DESTRUCTION, ECONOMIC CHAOS BUT HAND IT TO GOD AND GET IN A HOT BATH</i>	KEEP CALM AND THINK OF THE POWER OF GOD. REMEMBER "THE MEEK SHALL INHERIT THE EARTH".	<i>RAISING KIND CHILDREN. DEEP BREATHING & FORGIVENESS. DON'T EXPECT PERFECTION AND BREATHE</i>
KEEP CALM AND TAKE A SHOWER	KEEP CALM AND PRAY FOR LIFE	KEEP CALM AND TRUST IN THE LORD	KEEP CALM AND LAUGH WITH OTHERS	KEEP CALM AND CARRY ON. JESUS IS ALIVE.
THAT WORRY IS POINTLESS. LISTEN TO BOB MARLEY.	KEEP CALM AND TRUST IN GOD EACH DAY		KEEP CALM AND CARRY ON GAMING	KEEP CALM AND TALK TO SOMEBODY

Mark 13

The Coming of the Son of Man

24 'But in those days, after that suffering,

the sun will be darkened,

and the moon will not give its light,

25 and the stars will be falling from heaven,

and the powers in the heavens will be shaken.

26 Then they will see "the Son of Man coming in clouds" with great power and glory. 27 Then 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.

The Lesson of the Fig Tree

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. 29 So also, when you see these things taking place, you know that he is near, at the very gates. 30 Truly I tell you, this generation will not pass away until all these things have taken place. 31 Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.

The Necessity for Watchfulness

32 'But about that day or hour no one knows, neither the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. 33 Beware, keep alert; for you do not know when the time will come. 34 It 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. 35 Therefore, 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, 36 or else he may find you asleep when he comes suddenly. 37 And what I say to you I say to all: Keep awake.'