

Dean's Letter, 1 December 2019

Dear Cathedral family, Brothers and Sisters in Christ

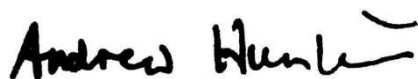
Today is Advent Sunday and the beginning of the Church's Year. This is different from the secular or financial year which runs from January to December, and which governs so much of what we do. Instead, the Church's Year tells the story of our salvation: beginning with Advent, running through to Christmas and Epiphany, then on to Ash Wednesday, Lent, Holy Week, Good Friday and Easter; into Eastertide, Ascension, the Day of Pentecost, and Trinity Sunday. We spend about six months telling and reflecting on this salvation story – all that God has done for us in Christ, and our life as the redeemed and forgiven people of God. We are new people, a new creation, born not of flesh and blood but by the Spirit of God, members of the body of Christ, sharing in the life of the kingdom of God.

Nor is this kingdom of God some other, heavenly, distant realm. To belong to God in Christ is not simply an "escape hatch to heaven" or another religion. It is about what happens here and now. As Bishop Tom Wright puts it: "The Christian hope is the resurrection of Jesus, which God had long planned to begin the new creation...[the point and purpose of all this is so that we may] "take part in, to share in and to become part of God's new creation"¹.

The season of Advent is a time of preparation for the coming of Christ at Christmas and for His return as King and Judge at the end of the world. The prophecies of the "end times" are complex and have often been distorted, misused or misunderstood. As one writer puts it, "we live in the 'between times', the 'now' of our salvation and the 'not yet' of its complete fulfilment"². The tumult and fragility of the world, its politics and economics, climate change and natural disasters, the upheaval and disintegration of society, as well as personal tragedies, all point to a highly unstable world that is changing and that cannot last forever. The Gospel for today (Matthew 24:36-44) speaks of this in no uncertain terms: "Keep awake, therefore, for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming". The "day of the Lord", in some ways, is a time of judgement, a day to be feared.

But it is not all doom and gloom. Isaiah 2:1-5 (our OT reading) paints a different picture: "they shall beat their swords into ploughshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore" (Is 2:4). A picture and a vision of hope and peace. Advent is a time for us to dream and vision – to hear God's vision – the big story, the story of hope and new possibilities, the emerging picture of the kingdom of God, the rule of Christ in our lives and in the world. Following the rape and murder of Uyinene Mrwetyana, and similar tragedies, I committed the Cathedral to address this scourge. In particular, today, during the 16 Days of Activism against gender-based violence, I ask all boys and men to join me in taking a firm stand against all forms of abuse, sexual assault and violence.

My love to you all



1 NT Wright, Facebook article, accessed 20th November 2019

2 ACSA Lectionary 2018-2019