

Advent Sunday Isaiah 64:1-9, 1 Corinthians 1:3-9, Mark 13:24-end

One of the great themes of Advent is the second coming of our Lord Jesus Christ as Judge.... **Judgment** is often seen and felt as negative, unpopular and unwelcome. But perhaps we see it wrongly?

Besides the domination of our news by the coronavirus, the headlines are often full of the woes of the world: selfishness of some at the expense of others, violence between peoples and in homes, cruelty, exploitation of the weak, corruption in governments, human trafficking and slavery.....

When we hear these things, there is a longing in our hearts for something better, for all the wrong in the world to be put right, for suffering to come to an end. It is not just a Christmas card sentiment to wish for peace in the world. There is something in every human heart that says injustice must be stopped, evil punished, cruelty condemned, a better world sought. In other words, we long for **judgment!**

The picture of Jesus as the coming Judge is a central feature of our faith, and the fact that there will indeed be a judgment is another. As we say together in the Creed, *'He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead.'* In this judgment God will set the world right, once and for all.

Throughout the Bible, God's coming judgment is seen as a **good** thing, something to be celebrated, longed for, yearned over. In our Old Testament reading Isaiah says, *'O that you would tear open the heavens and come down, so that the mountains would quake at your presence... so that the nations might tremble at your presence!'* (Isaiah 64:1-2)

The psalmist says even creation rejoices in God's judgment, *'Let the floods clap their hands; let the hills sing together for joy at the presence of the Lord, for he is coming to judge the earth. He will judge the world with righteousness, and the peoples with equity.'* (Psalm 98:8-9)

In a world of systematic injustice, bullying, violence, arrogance and oppression, the thought that there might be a day coming when the wicked are firmly put in their place and the poor and abused rescued, is surely good news. Faced with a world acting so selfishly, surely a good God must be a God of judgment.

We might perhaps agree with this, but have reservations, or fears, when we think of judgment coming upon us and our lives, and our loved ones. But Judgment is good news not bad. It is good news because the one through whom God's justice will finally sweep the world is not a hard-hearted, arrogant or vengeful tyrant, but the one who became human, like us, who understands all our weaknesses and failings, **Jesus**, who loves us and died for us all, the Messiah who took the world's worst upon himself on the cross, the one whose coming into our world as a baby laid in a manger, we prepare to celebrate... As Paul says in our epistle, *'He will also strengthen you to the end, so that you may be blameless on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ.'* (1 Corinthians 1:8) Yes, we are sinful people, but we are forgiven. God has provided for our forgiveness in Jesus Christ. As Paul proclaims, *'There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.'* (Romans 8:1) There need be no fear for us in facing the day of judgment.

Judgment is putting right all that has gone wrong with ourselves and the world, restoring God's purposes and rule. This is what God's Kingdom is all about, the Kingdom that we pray for each day in the Lord's Prayer. Can we not rejoice in this coming about?

Judgment is to happen when Christ returns, when all things will be restored in him, when we will all rise to join those who have gone before us, to inhabit a new heaven and new earth, where God will rule for ever and ever. What a wonderful time that will be!

For Christians these teachings give us **Hope**, which is a major theme of Advent. We are encouraged to live and work and pray for a better world now, confident that one day all our work will find its fulfilment in God's Kingdom. Let us not give up hope, but know that judgment is coming, and it will be a time of great rejoicing in heaven and on earth. **Amen**