

**Monday 23 November 2020**

**Clement of Rome, Martyr c100**

Dear Friends

What a wonderful walk with the dogs this morning!

The frost was too heavy to bother getting the car out to go down the canal and so we walked around the Oakalls and down into Finstall and back. Lovely in the frost and the fog; reminders of what the weather can be like in the hinterland between autumn and winter.

The reason for this letter early in the week is because we are nearing Advent, and I thought I would write to let you know how I will be marking the season and encourage you to make it special too.

By now you know that I accumulate books. I don't think I can say I collect books as such – that sounds far too intentional – but I do accumulate them. I look forward to returning to the charity shops and second-hand bookshops next year; not to look for anything specific, but simply for the joy of discovering something otherwise unknown. Many a time I have fallen in love with a writer simply through the accident of browsing.

So, with Advent on the horizon I have returned to that part of my bookshelf devoted to devotional reading for the seasons. It may surprise you that devotional reading is something often overlooked by today's clergy; too many other things feel pressing most of the time. But the arrival of an important Christian season beckons and so it feels right to make it a priority.

I have settled on 'Come, Lord Jesus' by Geoffrey Rowell and Julien Chilcott-Monk. This is a set of daily readings to take me from this coming Sunday, Advent Sunday, all the way through to 2 February, which marks the formal end of Christmas-tide in the Feast of the Presentation of Christ in the Temple. This book prints all the daily bible readings in the text avoiding the need for a separate bible – always a plus in my view! The book was published in 2001 and I've had it for at least 12 years but have never read it. Perhaps its moment has arrived...

For me to commit to this marks quite a change in my daily habits. But I think that is what these special seasons in the church's year offer and demand of us. Marking them is also more important than ever as otherwise the churches are in danger of being swept up and

into the secularisation of Christmas. We need to demonstrate that for Christians, Christmas is not all carols and nativity plays – but that there is something deeper and life changing involved too. I encourage you therefore to think about how you are going to mark Advent this year. The important point in all this is to do something different for and with God. The options are endless. But by Christmas it would be good if we could all answer ‘I made Advent different this year by...’

#### Suggestions:

- Create a special time in your day for prayer or devotional reading
- Join the Advent Study Group on zoom: Living in Hope by Catherine Fox 11am Thursdays starting 26<sup>th</sup> November (contact Tessa on 873135)
- Make use of the resources provided by the national Church:  
<https://www.churchofengland.org/prayer-and-worship/join-us-service-daily-prayer>
- Take a walk down a different street each day praying for the homes you pass
- Read a book of the Bible you don’t know at all
- Take an interest in a local charity or organisation that supports people in need and learn as much about them as you can
- Write to a prisoner (contact <https://www.amnesty.org.uk/actions>)

Finally, I know there is a lot of anxiety around this week as we await news of what Christmas might be like for us all this year. And so, I close with some words from the 16th century Teresa of Avilla, rooted in Psalm 23 that I will be using in Joyce Carter’s funeral service this week:

“Let nothing disturb you,  
nothing frighten you,  
all things are passing,  
God is unchanging.  
Patience gains all;  
nothing is lacking to those who have God:  
God alone is sufficient.

May you know God’s presence and peace this week:

With God’s blessing

David Ford, Rector

01527 873831

revdavidford@googlemail.com