

**Wednesday 2 December 2020**

**“those who endure to the end, will be saved”**

*Mark 13.13*

Dear Friends

Advent is here!

The great countdown to Christmas is now officially underway. I always find it an exciting season of expectation and hope; it's a time to discover pleasure and meaning in the experience of waiting.

One might think of 2020 as an 'Advent' year; an entire year spent waiting...waiting to hug families and friends, waiting for a vaccine, waiting for the latest rules, waiting...waiting...

Advent offers a different perspective on all this - for our faith teaches us that we have no reason to doubt whilst we wait; no reason to be anxious; no reason to be fearful.

One of the traditional Advent themes – death – has returned to the forefront of everyone's mind this year. 130 years ago, death was commonplace. Every family experienced it regularly and no child was sheltered from its ever-present reality. Walk through any churchyard and you learn that truth. You can also see it clearly in old baptism registers. My predecessors spent a good deal of their ministry baptising infants – not through a desire to 'grow the church', but out of parental fear that if their child died in infancy, baptism would open the gates of heaven for them.

For current generations, death is not a daily topic of conversation, until now. Suddenly, brutally, everyone is talking about it. The daily statistics have become a mournful feature of news bulletins. I've no idea what this might be doing to the nation's mental health but everyone is more conscious of mortality than ever before.

Christians have a different perspective on all this. As we look towards Christmas, we look towards the one who turned our understanding of death upside down, and in the process, turned our understanding of life upside down too.

Geoffrey Rowell puts it like this: “Beyond the horizon of our dying is the horizon of resurrection life, the new and eternal life which is the gift of God in Jesus Christ. Our horizons have changed...”

One question for you in this first week of Advent then is this: how has faith changed the horizons of your life during this most challenging of years?

It's a challenging question, as for most of us, our daily horizons have closed in around this year. We've been stuck at home much more, perhaps for some, completely stuck at home all year. As the walls close in around us though, it is still possible to broaden our horizons and reach beyond our limitations. Technology helps enormously – even the old technologies of phone and letter writing. But sometimes it is our internal horizons that are most important, and that, of course, is where faith resides, in our hearts. Stimulating our faith – through music and the arts especially – is enormously beneficial to our spiritual, physical and emotional health.

If you have yet to finish Christmas shopping, I have a book recommendation for you today. "The Boy, the Mole, the Fox and the Horse" by Charlie Mackery (Penguin: 9781529105100). This is an adult picture book that will take you ten minutes to read and a lifetime to benefit from its wisdom.

There isn't really a storyline so there's no need for a spoiler alert. Essentially, the book is about loving difference and the importance of taking the basics of life seriously. I'll share just one maxim from its many offerings: "most of the old moles I know, wish they had listened less to their fears and more to their dreams."

This made me sit up in bed with a jolt and I quickly began to mentally list my fears. You'll be familiar with the list because I suspect they are all on your list too – not being a success, being disliked, being lonely (as opposed to alone), becoming unwell... And then I turned to my dreams. And I discovered it's really a very short list and eminently achievable: make a difference to others; take care of those close to me; step as lightly as possible on the world itself.

The world is dominated by fear, but we need not be. Turn inwards for a few moments each day, connect with your dreams and your faith, and let them broaden your horizons, however close those walls impress upon you.

Rejoice! Jesus is coming!

With God's blessing

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