

## **How Long?**

### **Advent 1 – 27<sup>th</sup> November 2011**

***Readings:***

**Mark 13:24-37**

**Come, Lord Jesus. Make us discontent with the present, eager for the future.**

**Come, Lord Jesus. Give us confidence that you hear us when we cry out, that you not only hear, but that you also come to us and care about us.**

**Come, Lord Jesus. Give us your promised new heaven and new earth.**

**Bless us with your presence. Come, stand among us, beside us.**

**Save us from the world and from ourselves. Come Lord Jesus. Come.**

There must be some law immutably emblazoned in the heavens - that if you get in a queue at the supermarket - even if it is the shortest at the start, that queue will end up the slowest. The check-out person will either need a price check for the customer in front of you or there'll be something wrong with the method of payment. It happens to me all the time! What about you? And it drives me crazy. Jenny of course, being a woman and being at a higher level of consciousness, takes it all in her stride, smiling serenely as she watches me stew.

I admit it - I can be as impatient as a Qantas pilot waiting for a pay rise.

But you know impatience is not necessarily all that bad. There are some things for which we should be impatient. And I'm not talking about a supermarket queue or Qantas pilot pay rise! There's the way our world is at the moment.

Can any of us be content with what's happening in our world? There's a great deal about which we need to be impatient. There's the pain and suffering that occurs within our families. How many of us have longed for the suffering of a loved one to be at an end. Now there's something to be impatient about. Where are you God?

There's the stupidity that claims that if someone is violent towards you then you can solve the conflict by being even more violent towards them. Children, neighbours, even nations, or especially nations, go tit for tat. Now there's something to be impatient about. Where are you God?

And there's the shameful fact that the world has enough resources that when properly shared there is no reason for anyone to starve, to be homeless, to die of diseases like AIDS, malaria, tuberculosis. Surely there's something to be impatient about. Where are you God?

We live in a world where there is real reason to be impatient. Real reason to ask God, as the prophet Isaiah does, to tear open the heavens and come down and put an end to all this stupidity, all this suffering all this self-serving injustice.

Being impatient is not necessarily a bad thing.

Our readings today seem to speak directly to our cries to bring to an end the suffering, the senseless violence, the inequality, that seems to have become so much part of our life today. As they were in Isaiah's day.

Isaiah calls out to his God, our God, to come down and put an end to the hopelessness being experienced by the children of Israel. A people in exile. A people who felt they had lost their homeland, their temple, their God. *Tear open the heavens, God and come down, they cry. Set things to right.*

And the first hearers of Mark's Gospel share that same sense of forsakenness. Shunned by their Jewish friends and neighbours, thrown out of the synagogues where the early Christian church had worshipped, persecuted by their Roman overlords, Mark has Jesus describe a time of final judgement when the world will be put to rights, and the Son of Man will gather together his elect. A world where God in Jesus Christ will rule supreme. Mark's piece of apocalyptic writing is a call for God to intervene in the ways of humanity, to bring to an end our waiting, our suffering. Indeed he gets so carried away, so impatient that he says that God will come again within a generation.

But still we wait, some of us impatient, some of us, like Isaiah wondering at times where God has disappeared to. All looking to the day when God will break through to us in an earth-shattering way, as he did in Bethlehem, as he did at Calvary.

But it's hard sometimes to be patient. Recently I read a piece about Mother Theresa of Calcutta. Apparently they have just discovered her personal papers, and in them is revealed her 50 year struggle with doubt. In 1958 she writes *"My smile is a great cloak that hides a multitude of pains. Because I am forever smiling, people think my faith, my hope, my love, are overflowing and that intimacy with God and union with his will fill my heart. If only they knew...."* If only they knew.

But it comes as no surprise to me that Mother Theresa should be wracked with doubt, should wonder at times where are you God.

For anyone who could, day after day, year after year travel the slums of Calcutta witnessing such human degradation would have to wonder where God was in all that human misery, would have to ask God to tear the heavens apart and come to earth to redeem and save us. But you know, in Mother Theresa I believe he was already doing that. But it's often hard to see when you're surrounded by such degradation and such institutional misery.

And perhaps you share her doubts if you have ever struggled with the pain and suffering of a loved who longs to die but lingers on. But like Mother Theresa, you stay with the suffering, the pain because you believe that there will be an ending there and the end times will come and Christ will return and making all things new.

That's why Mark's little apocalypse was so important to Mark's community, and to ours, because it gives us the hope we need to continue in ministry, to continue working where there appears to be no hope.

I have a friend, who told me of how he felt as he watched his much loved parents grow old and sick. Watching the suffering was not easy for him. He and his wife longed for God to tear the heavens wide, to tarry no longer, to relieve them of their veil of tears.

He told me of what hard work it was to continue to believe in a silent God who on the face of it had abandoned them to their fate, even when he knew the story of God's mighty acts on our behalf. One day as he was waiting for his mother to finish her semi-weekly session of kidney dialysis, his father sighed with the wisdom and faithful resignation that comes from 80 years of life in Christ, "All we have is hope." All we have is hope.

And for those of us who know these Advent texts, that's a great deal. Our hope sustains our faith that soon God will rend the heavens wide. Christ will return and we will be invited home. In the meantime we live with small glimpses of heaven, in the tender touch, the caring question, the unexpected action, the shoulder to cry on, all of these tiny openings to God's purpose for the world and all of creation - that we are made whole. That's what this Advent time is about, not a countdown to Christmas but a focussing on the fact that our God will and does act to bring wholeness to all Creation. So until that time let us remain alert, and awake, working as Mother Theresa did, as my friend did, in the sure and certain hope that Christ has come and Christ will come again.

*Rev Tony Duncan*  
*27<sup>th</sup> November 2011*  
[pilgrim.tony@tassie.net.au](mailto:pilgrim.tony@tassie.net.au)