

## Advent Sunday 2016

I don't usually start my sermons with a poem – but I'd like to read R.S Thomas' 'The Bright Field' this morning.

This poem sits above my desk in my study – has done for over a decade – it's a poem that encourages me to STOP. PRAY. NOTICE.

### The Bright Field

I have seen the sun break through  
to illuminate a small field  
for a while, and gone my way  
and forgotten it. But that was the  
pearl of great price, the one field that had  
treasure in it. I realise now  
that I must give all that I have  
to possess it. Life is not hurrying

on to a receding future, nor hankering after  
an imagined past. It is the turning  
aside like Moses to the miracle  
of the lit bush, to a brightness  
that seemed as transitory as your youth  
once, but is the eternity that awaits you.

Advent is a poetic season in the liturgical year – it rests on simple words – hoping, waiting, expectation, preparation, longing – but words that resonate at so many levels – at a superficial level we could apply all these words to our thoughts about the content of our Christmas Stocking – but Advent is about thinking about simple things at a very deep level. It is about pondering and thoughtfulness, depth and discovery – these simple words - hoping, waiting, expectation, preparation, longing – help us to reflect on our hope for the world, our hope for God's Kingdom to come on earth, our hope for the coming of Jesus.

**Waiting** is a key theme of Advent. Modern people are not good at waiting and expectation. Well not the average London person anyway. Standing waiting for the train to come we have to be told exactly how many minutes it is until the

next one – such is our sense of urgency. Each second pulsating with the sense of time ticking on.

We live in a world where every second counts – time is money, everything's a hurry – and this is the predominant reason for an increase in stress and mental health problems.

Humans are *not* designed only to live within the confines and boundaries this kind of *strict time keeping*.

We are also designed to need to inhabit 'deep time'.

The Greek language (the language of the New Testament) has a couple of words that mean "time." The first is the most familiar—*chronos* . It means the chronology of days, governed by the carefully calculated earths' sweep around the sun. The ticking of the seconds and minutes and day... That's how we live – in chronos time.

But another word for time is also used in the New Testament—*kairos* . This speaks more to specific, God-ordained times throughout history, sometimes called the "right time" or "appointed season". Kairos is God's dimension—one not marked by the past, the present, or the future.

This Kairos time is when we glimpse eternity – have a sense of moving beyond one day following another... to deep time, holy time, sacred time.

It's the difference between a shopping list and a poem.

It's the difference between a jingle and an aria.

It's the difference being and doing.

It's the difference between existing and being alive.

God has set within us the need for these two time dimensions – we need a balance of both.

We can't get stuff done without chronos.

We can't live life in all its fullness without Kaiross.

Advent is a time when we begin a new liturgical year – a new year in the church's calendar, it's a time of new beginnings.

Advent is a time when we focus on holy pausing – training ourselves to wait in expectation of the coming of Jesus – both as God incarnate – the child in the manger – and as the King of Kings at the end of the age.

But as I prepare to mark a good and holy Advent – I want to pray more for Jesus to be present in my daily chronos life.... I want to pray that I might be aware of those Kairos moments when God's life breaks in – when I am struck by awe, struck by wonder, struck by love, struck by holiness, struck by grace, struck by mercy.

These moments can come to me on the bus, when I notice the beauty of a child's face, in the park when I notice the light dancing through the leaves, as I open the curtains of my bedroom window and notice the light advent purple of the sky.

In the hurry and the rush and the madness that can become the substance of December – I might miss these things.

But if I practise holy pausing – I will see these Kairos moments, these moments of grace. And breathe. And pray. And give thanks.

And I will by God's grace, make room for Christ's love and light in my heart this Advent – so that I might have a fresh experience of him – helping me to be Christ-focussed and ready share the good news of his love with all this Christmas.

**Amen.**

*These are the sermon notes for the sermon Revd Sheridan James (Vicar of St Catherine's) preached on Advent Sunday. A sermon is always better live, but these notes give you a fair sense of what was preached that day.*