

**Collect, Readings and Sermon for Sunday 29<sup>th</sup> November 2020**  
**First Sunday of Advent**

**Collect**

Almighty God,  
as your kingdom dawns,  
turn us from the darkness of sin to the  
light of holiness,  
that we may be ready to meet you  
in our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ.  
Amen.

**1 Corinthians 1:3-9**

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

I give thanks to my God always for you because of the grace of God that has been given you in Christ Jesus, for in every way you have been enriched in him, in speech and knowledge of every kind— just as the testimony of Christ has been strengthened among you— so that you are not lacking in any spiritual gift as you wait for the revealing of our Lord Jesus Christ. He will also strengthen you to the end, so that you may be blameless on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. God is faithful; by him you were called into the fellowship of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.

**Mark 13:24-end**

‘But in those days, after that suffering,  
the sun will be darkened,  
and the moon will not give its light,  
and the stars will be falling from heaven,  
and the powers in the heavens will be shaken.

Then they will see “the Son of Man coming in clouds” with great power and glory. Then he will send out the angels, and gather his elect from the four winds, from the ends of the earth to the ends of heaven.

‘From the fig tree learn its lesson: as soon as its branch becomes tender and puts forth its leaves, you know that summer is near. So also, when you see these things taking place, you know that he is near, at the very gates. Truly I tell you, this generation will not pass away until all these things have taken place. Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.

‘But about that day or hour no one knows, neither the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. Beware, keep alert; for you do not know when the time will come. It is like a man going on a journey, when he leaves home and puts his slaves in charge, each with his work, and commands the doorkeeper to be on the watch. Therefore, keep awake—for you do not know when the master of the house will come, in the evening, or at midnight, or at cockcrow, or at dawn, or else he may find you asleep when he comes suddenly. And what I say to you I say to all: Keep awake.’

## Sermon by Jason Gray

Well hello Church and I hope you are all well today!!

Today marks the start of our Advent journey and it has a very strong Marken message about staying awake and staying alert.

I will never forget walking to the Worcester Park Railway station one morning on my way to London and as I was about to step off the curb in Sandringham Avenue I heard the sound of a car which immediately sped around the corner right in front of me.

My alertness stopped me stepping off the curb and directly into the oncoming vehicle that would have cleaned me up. It was literally a couple of feet away from me ending up on its bonnet.

I was incredibly shaken and so thankful that I did hear that car at the last moment as it sped around the corner in front of me. Danger can happen at the most unexpected times if we are not alert or awake to what is going on around us....

I have to say this message about staying awake is really quite counter-cultural to the way 21<sup>st</sup> century living seems to be taking us:

- These days you can pay all your bills online and have them automated to go out on specific days without your intervention.
- You can do all your shopping online and have it delivered to your door at your convenience.
- When I play golf, the GPS will tell me the exact distance to the flag on the green from where my ball sits on the fairway as I prepare to play my next shot.
- It won't be long and there will be driverless cars on the road.
- And the one I find really cool, if you have an Alexa you can programme it so it will tell you if you have won a prize on the Premium Bonds!

So, in many respects we are being encouraged to leave the world of alertness behind. We are being encouraged to lead an easy life and let other things be in control of our situations.

But Mark was telling his early church to remain expectant and alert because they were waiting for the 2<sup>nd</sup> coming of Christ. It was imminent. He wanted them to be ready.

I love that very simple observation about the fig tree and knowing when summer is coming. Being observant is so important.

It is so easy to let the simplest of observations pass us by if we let ourselves get caught up in our own "**bubble of importance**".

Sometimes it's just too easy to let life go onto autopilot or become blinkered as we put ourselves first and not take into account the needs of those around us.

If I look back at my own life, I can see times when I've lacked awareness to the things that really mattered, and I failed to see them. I was too busy getting caught up in my own dream rather than listening and seeing the things that really needed my attention. Sometimes it's just too easy to turn the radar off or not to listen to what is going on around you.

Have you been there yourself?? Believe me it's easy!!

Cries of “I never saw this coming” or “how did I end up in this position?” are common when we end up in those stressful situations when we haven’t remained alert or awake to what is going on around us.

But Mark encourages us to remain vigilant and alert just like the slave waiting for the master’s return. It doesn’t matter that we don’t know the hour of His return.

What is important is that we are carrying out the work that the Master gave us and then we don’t need to worry about the time of his return because that is irrelevant.

What is important is that we outwork those behaviours that are so critical to making God’s word true in the lives of those around us.

As Bishop Jo said last week in her sermon the church here in Cuddington has been here for over 900 years. It has witnessed civil wars, world wars, catastrophic financial depressions and recessions and now we face into a global pandemic where the problem is not even visible.

There is no greater and important time as we live through this second lockdown to remain alert and aware to what is going on around us.

Of even bigger importance is to be helping and looking after each other in love and kindness.

Being aware of each other’s needs, checking in on people and making sure people are OK and offering support where needed is the modern-day example of observing the changes in the fig tree.

When we engage in this level of awareness, we are demonstrating God’s love and witness of His word and the story is no longer about us.

This sort of Christian behaviour is what breeds hope and an understanding that God’s love is alive and real in our challenging everyday world.

As we prepare for the Christmas season let’s remain alert and aware to the needs and issues of those around us and in the process we will be demonstrating hope and the enduring love of God that passes all understanding and is not bound by time or the problems that land on our human plate.

In the name of Jesus. **Amen**.