

Advent – Hope
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Welcome to Advent! It is the season of Preparing for Christmas. It comes from the Latin word for coming! Advent is all about anticipation, my daughter Lucy is the Queen of Anticipation. Her birthday is the 13th of December and we have been counting down for 3 months! Party Plan, Presents, Count down. She is so excited about turning 12! And to me she is the model of what

advent should be like for us. Advent should be fun! It should be anticipation! It should be a time of Hope. No grouchy faces, because we know the real secret of Christmas.

Advent always starts with thinking about the second coming of Jesus. And again this should be something exciting to anticipate, the day when God's rule will be complete! When we shall have a new King on the throne – and he's a good guy! Whether you think of the end of this season of the world as a gradual process ending with the return of Jesus; or a great upending of history. The return of Jesus is something to anticipate.

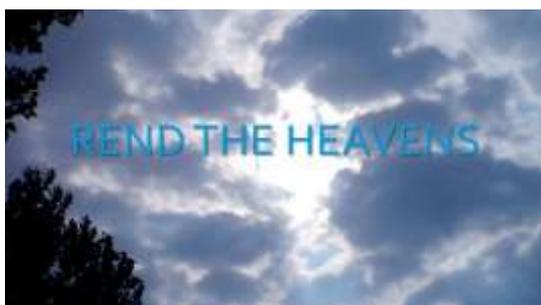
The idea is that people basically missed the first coming of Jesus, despite all the foretelling Jesus slipped into the world largely unnoticed! Let's learn our lesson and not miss the second coming. So today I want to talk about cry and anticipation, "Why did people cry out to God to rend the heavens and come down", and then to celebrate AND HE HAS, AND HE IS here among us.



I'll talk about the second coming of Jesus briefly and then I want to talk about not missing Jesus in the everyday.

In all advent I want to call us to return to our first love. No not that freckle faced girl you kissed behind the bike sheds. Not even remembering the hope and anticipation of your wedding day. No I want to call us back to our first love, for Jesus.

Christmas is not trifle, it is not presents, it is not champagne, it's not even family. No this Christmas – I want to call you to put Jesus first, the refugee baby, the miracle working teaching, the crucified King who changes everything. My friends this Christmas let's worship the creator not the creation. I want to subvert the Maori Proverb; **He aha te mea nui o te ao** What is the most important thing in the world? **He atua, he atua, he Ihu Kariti** It is God, it is God, it is Jesus.



Isaiah records this great cry of the people of all generations. **God come down**, God of Justice and God of all that's fair, tear the heavens open and come down. Rend the heavens, cut the padlock, jump the fence, break the window – and come and rescue us. This is a cry of people who are oppressed, where no one sees and no one cares

and there is darkness and harsh treatment – the people cry out **Rend the heavens.**

This is the cry of a people who are lonely, who are caught up in their psychological despair, where nothing makes sense and life is too hard, **Rend the heavens**

This is the cry of a people caught up in their own sin and guilt who don't know how to escape their past and their choking future, save us, **Rend the heavens**

This is the cry of a people who have grown tired of the manipulation of a humanist state who sees people only for our economic value. **Rend the heavens.**

But when I look at the Manager in Bethlehem my heart finds peace, because God has torn the veil, and was and is active in the world bringing Hope and Justice and Compassion. Rend the heavens? He has in Jesus. Not what we expected, but mighty to save



I love Isaiah's little picture of twigs making water boil, I guess they used a clay pot in those days, and I'm sure Isaiah would never have seen a thermette, but he would have approved. This is a picture of boiling anger, of anger rightly placed. Anger against the enemies of God. Anger can be an amazing emotion for action. I think sometimes we don't get angry enough about injustice or evil,

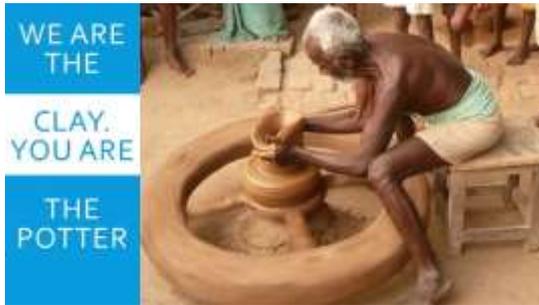
or wrong. This picture is not about dissipated anger; it is focused anger that achieves a goal. The water boils, the nation's quake. Lots of people get angry at Christmas – sadly there are many family fights over Christmas. As followers of Jesus I want to encourage you to harness your anger well for a positive result. If you get angry at someone's selfishness, spend time with someone who's lonely. If you get angry at greed – give away more than you expected to. If you get angry at violence, forgive more completely than you thought you ever could. Harness your anger – be the Meek, the tamed horse and inherit the world. Use your passion for Jesus.



Then Isaiah remembers the story of Moses and Sinai, when God came down on the Mountain and the Mountain trembled, and God gave his people laws that brought Peace and Hope and Justice to the community; laws that not even a King would be above. I remember watching TV last week and watching a farmer in Zimbabwe pleading that with the new regime there would be the rule of

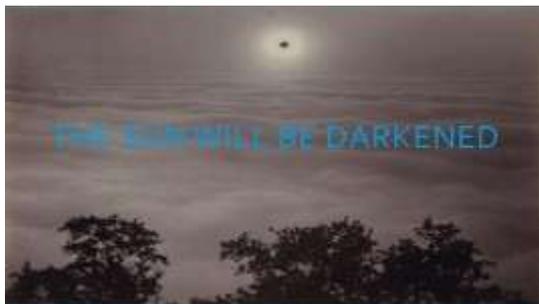
law, and not the rule of the mob. I think in the West there is a concerted attack on the rule of Law. Good Law does not discriminate between white or brown, Asian or African, male or female, powerful or poor. Without fear or favour, affection or ill-will, our laws and justice system stand firmly on the foundation of the laws given to Moses at Mt Sinai 3300 years ago. I think we have no idea of what a gift the law of Moses was to people, in the Greco Roman world there were many people who were not Jewish affiliated themselves with Moses because they could see the tremendous good of this law given, **when God came down.** When the mountains rumbled. Don't believe the secular humanists who will claim we all know what is right. In the Greco Roman world, it was perfectly acceptable for a visiting man to be offered a male or female child slave for his sexual pleasure, and everyone thought it was normal. And Isaiah says visit us again, make the mountains tremble. – God act on behalf of those who wait

for you! Remember Isaiah 40, those who wait on the Lord. This Christmas will you wait on Santa or wait on the Lord?



Here's this lovely verse, we are the clay, we are mouldable, our bodies respond incredibly to how we use them, work with your hands and you will have callouses, lift heavy weights and you will grow strong, think about deceitful things and you will be tempted; think about pure and good things and you will grow pure. You are the potter, God is shaping us, sometimes through good

experiences and sometimes through hard ones. I listened to Catherine Byrne from Hospice last Sunday night. She was talking about how the doctors there can relieve most pain, but also of the amazing things that she sees suffering can do in a life, rifts are healed, families restored, dignity is returned when people have time to die, yes even in some suffering; but so much possibility is lost when a life is cut off short. And so I say, in exciting times and in rough times; trust the hand of the potter. God will shape you if you let him.



Let's turn to Mark, Mark records Jesus warning us to expect his return. It's a jolt, most of us don't really expect it. That's the problem. People missed the arrival of the messiah the first time. So why should we worry about being ready for the arrival of the Messiah the second time. The bible says we won't be able to miss the second coming. The sun will be turned black; the stars will fall

from heaven. But why should we care?

Because we can become too comfortable, and then we fall asleep while we are living, and we can sleep through life – not enjoying life to the full – not caring for those who are dying and most of all missing out on living with Jesus.

The great warning of advent is against complacency, everything will always be as it always has been, there is no real change. It's quite a Buddhist view of life. Whereas Jesus teaches, I am making all things new, join with me in the remaking.

Do you live with Jesus now? If you live with Jesus now. You have nothing to fear. But Be prepared that the way the world is now, is not the way the world will always be. When we believe that things will always be the way they have always been, we surrender our ability to change the world for the better. This advent – Don't surrender.



Don't surrender to the inevitable, surrender to God. Anticipate the coming of Jesus at Christmas and most of all – believe that people can change. I want to finish by setting you a treasure hunt through advent, see where you can see Jesus at love and at work, in the church, in people, in culture, in Christian and in non-Christian places. Watch out for Jesus. Search for Jesus. I have this

lovely idea of looking for the signature of Jesus in people's lives.