



**St Andrew's Parish Church Guernsey**  
**Advent Sunday – Sermon for 10.00am 29 November 2020**  
**Bible Readings: Isaiah 64: 1-9 & St Mark 13: 1-9**  
**Given by Rev Juliette E C Robilliard**

### **The key to living and learning**

Dear St Andrew, our Patron Saint, always seems to get trumped by Advent Sunday! Actually, the last person to complain about this would be Andrew, the quiet disciple, so different to his rumbustious brother Peter. All Andrew wanted was that people would know Christ and learn his ways. And learning is the essence of my sermon today. I'm sure, those of you who are parents or teachers or like me in my working life will have found that when training raw recruits one size does not fit all. Some people are very reflective and like to mull over a matter seeing it from every angle before taking action, whereas others just want to dive straight in and experience it learning from their mistakes. I'm the sort of person that if I can see the big picture in my head then I can tell the story but if you take the metaphorical paintbrush out of my hand and paint the brushstrokes for me, I'm likely to sit there baffled because the picture you might create in my mind's eye may turn out more like a challenging cubist Picasso than a classic Rembrandt that I would recognise.

### **A Gospel message for everyone**

In the Gospel this morning Jesus' tries three different illustrations to explain his message to his eclectic group of disciples hoping that something will resonate with them. He begins by drawing from scripture to paint an apocalyptic scene comparable to the writings of Daniel as also, a development of the time of judgement prophesied by Isaiah. Jesus depicts a scene of abject horror when the sun and the moon will darken and stars will fall from the sky and the 'hole earth will be shaken. Mercifully, in the midst of this chaos a recognisable human figure, the Son of Man, steps out of the clouds commanding his angels to go to the four corners of the world to rescue the redeemed from the chaos so that none will be lost. From that extreme picture, Jesus changes tack completely illustrating with the everyday, 'From the fig tree learn its lesson.' The shrivelled winter branches, which make us think that all is dead and can never thrive will suddenly burst forth with green shoots and leaves and from these, we know that summer is near. The crop of fruit will ripen and the farmer will harvest all, so that nothing precious is lost.

### **What's in it for us?**

What message does this have to say to us today? We who are God's creation are in his hands and throughout the seasons of our lives he provides messages of salvation for our learning. We are fruitful and flourish when we emulate the Son of Man, who is the Son of God: such is the difference between eternal life and eternal death. The challenge, as Jesus says, is that no one apart from our heavenly Father

knows when the day of the Son of Man will be, therefore, we cannot afford to delay learning its message now.

### **How do we know what to look for?**

So, how then do we recognise the signs of the times and learn the lessons? Jesus says "Keep alert, keep awake." Fine, but what are we to look out for? He explains this illustratively by way of a parable. A man goes out on a journey and leaves his servants in charge to continue his work in his absence until his return. Jesus is referring to himself as the man and his followers as the servants continuing his work. The servants know only that the master will return but not when, maybe in the evening or, at midnight or, at cockcrow or, at dawn. Jesus is creating a picture in his disciples' minds that would have been familiar to them, as his parable mirrors the Roman military regime of the watches of the night. Those same watches were echoed in the evening of the Last Supper: of him being held by the High Priest at midnight; of Peter's denial as the cock crowed, and when he was handed over at dawn to the Roman soldiers for crucifixion. The bitter irony of this parable when it came to actual fruition, was that the disciples were far from alert and awake but sleeping on the job in the Garden of Gethsemane. How they must have reflected on this parable after Jesus' death and wept.

### **Journeying on faithfully**

Though the imagery Jesus uses may not be familiar to us, we too are his disciples, so this message is absolutely for us. From the moment of our birth we are nearer to the day of the Son of Man when he will come again to claim his kingdom here on earth and gather his people to him. In this whole message Jesus does not ask his disciples to undertake any activity or to be anything other than staying alert and awake and to look. By looking we can see how far the world has strayed from God's way: by looking we can see in our mind's eye how our own lives may have strayed from God's way. The remedy is in the Post Communion prayer, which is this:

O Lord our God,  
make us watchful and keep us faithful,  
as we wait the coming of your Son our Lord;  
that, when he shall appear,  
he may not find us sleeping in sin but active in his service  
and joyful in his praise;  
through Jesus Christ our Lord.  
Amen.