

“Are you ready yet?” When did you last say those words, perhaps exasperated as you wait for someone to do something they’d had plenty of notice for. I’ve said it loads of times, or if I’ve not said it I’ve wanted to: to my children in the morning, to colleagues in the office, to the choir just before a service. Are you ready yet? Waiting around for people to get ready is a pain. And of course, realising you’re not ready yourself and other people are waiting for you...that’s just embarrassing, unless you have the hide of a rhino and the emotional intelligence of a lettuce.

Advent Sunday asks ‘are you ready yet?’ In Latin ‘Advent’ means ‘to come’. Advent is about making sure that we’re ready for what’s coming up. And yes that means getting ready for Christmas. This is, after all, the most difficult time of the year. On what date is it appropriate to start saying ‘Have a good Christmas’ to people? There are complex calculations to make: distance from Christmas divided by the likelihood of seeing the person again before December 25th multiplied by remembering whether they are on your Christmas Card list in the first place.

We are blessed this year: Advent Sunday is the earliest it can be (because Christmas Day is a Sunday) so we have a bit more time. This season is then about making sure we’re ready, and, perhaps, not wishing someone a Happy Christmas too soon. It seems to me that a good Advent is to do with getting ready for the true celebration without getting ahead of ourselves. We do well to use the four Sundays before Christmas to engage in some self-examination – what are we actually getting ready for? What was Black Friday all about?

‘Are you ready yet’ in this context is a question about whether you’ve got your Christmas sorted and whether the gift giving is Christian generosity or consumption overload, whether the food and drink is Christian hospitality or over self-indulgence, whether the partying is Christian feasting or a way of blocking out the bits of the world we’d rather forget. Advent asks us to use these weeks to create a festival, not a knees-up, a celebration not a bender, something to which we would be honoured and delighted to welcome Christ himself. And he liked a party, remember.

But Advent is more than this. Of course we take the chance to act ‘as if’ Jesus is coming for the first time, but he has come, and we are called in this season to celebrate that by looking ahead to what is yet to come. Christians ‘remember’ in this season, not just that Jesus came, but that Jesus will come, this time as the King of Kings and Lord of Lords. This too is ‘remembering’ – *anamnesis* – remembering so that the reality of Jesus is present among us. This is, to quote my favourite phrase about Advent, remembering our future.

Jesus prepared his disciples to expect him to return in power and great glory, at the time when all things would be brought into subjection under his feet. The book Revelation ends with a cry for this to happen – *Maranatha*, Come Lord Jesus. We sing ‘O come O come’ not for the tiny baby, but for the one whose coming will cause every knee to bow, every secret to be made plain, every intention to be laid bare. We’d better be ready for that, he said. Make sure you are doing what you should be, and not doing what you shouldn’t be.

This is the context of our Gospel reading today: the Lord’s coming will be so unexpected that those going about their daily tasks will suddenly find that it has happened. Bang. No

air raid siren. No early warning detection system. Not even Jesus knew when it would be. But Matthew's Gospel is full of such warnings, and the big underlying question. 'Are you ready yet?'

That's where it gets difficult for me. If you have a bus to catch, or a service to do, or a Christmas to celebrate, you know when it is and how long you've got to get sorted for it. You can write it in your diary. You can have a project plan, a notebook with things to tick off, timers for the oven. You might be someone who prepares things well in advance – our house is full of wrapped Christmas presents already – or a lastminute dot com person – I've not bought mine yet. But either way the countdown means you know what you have to do.

With the second coming of Jesus we don't have a date and time. None of us know when Jesus's coming will be. 'Are you ready yet' simply becomes 'are you ready?' The trick is to be ready all the time. A few weeks ago I was woken by the police, who pressed my doorbell until I got up. It was 1.20 in the morning. I was in deep sleep. They had a concern about the Minster which, as it turned out, was not in any danger, though it might have been. Woken suddenly from a deep sleep I was incapable of rational thought, coherent speech or fine motor skills.

What life is like for people 'on call' I do not know. But that is the trick for Christians who want to be ready for whenever this age comes to an end and the age promised by God through the risen and ascended Jesus Christ comes into being. We sing about it often enough. The *Messiah* is full of it. Being ready all the time means living every day in the way Jesus taught, and never thinking that there'll be plenty of time to sort things out later. Advent is a time to ask whether I am longing for Christ to come. I want to be like the servant who is doing their proper job when the master returns.

I hope you are ready in time for Christmas. At least we know when that will be – it's December 25 this year. And through this Advent season I'll be reflecting on whether, if Jesus came tomorrow, I'll be ready.