



ELY CATHEDRAL

Weekly Reflection

by Canon Jessica Martin

1 December 2020

'Beware,' said Jesus, 'Keep alert; for you do not know when the time will come.'

Well, I thought, as I read the Gospel for Sunday just gone, that sounds horribly familiar! Keep alert, beware, keep on waiting – that's not Advent – that's 2020. All of it. And the waiting's not over yet.

So I've been thinking about that, about the sense of being stuck, caught in an endless groundhog day of in-and-out-of-restrictions, at the same time as having to be in just a bit of a heightened state, just a bit wary. Doing both those things at once is simultaneously so boring and...so exhausting.

And I've also been thinking how different that is from the kind of alertness Jesus is talking about. Because Jesus is talking about *expectation*.

A lot of the irony of being in restrictions around Christmas is the painful contrast between the 'waiting and watching' of everyday Covid-endurance and the 'waiting and watching' of looking forward, of expecting good things. When Jesus says, 'stay alert' because the kingdom of God is so near it might break in upon our ordinary world at any time - 'midnight, or cockcrow, or dawn' – that's about a wonderful, extraordinary possibility. Whereas sitting it out until there's a mass distribution of the vaccine doesn't feel quite the same!

We talked about this contrast at a Zoom 'breakfast meeting' at the Cathedral on Saturday – it's a regular get-together for interested members of the congregation, and we always look at the scripture for the service next day. And somehow we found ourselves talking about how we experienced the passing of time.

We talked about living attentively, in a way which pays attention to the good things of the present moment – whether it's birdsong, or qualities of the light, or a pleasant meal, or a phone conversation, or a growing hyacinth on the windowsill. We noticed that this was very like Jesus's 'keep awake' – like the attentiveness of Advent waiting.

Because in Advent we wait for someone who will come, but who is also already here: we are expectant for the coming of God's kingdom, but we know that the kingdom is already with us and amongst us, that God is our road as well as our journey's end.

So this kind of waiting is more like 'waiting on' God than 'waiting for' him. Making space for God's blessings and presence, being aware of the good things that speak of him, noticing the bonds of love which hold us in our human relationships are also holy.

There are better ways of 'being alert'. We don't have only to 'be alert' to danger. We can be alert to blessings and beauty, and expect the wonderful. We can 'wait on' the good in our lives, and notice that it is already there. We journey towards Jesus, but he is the path we travel upon as well. He is here every step of the way.

So this is what I am hearing when I read Jesus's words, 'Keep alert'. Don't let the signs of light pass you by, because they light up our world all the time. Don't wish away your time, it's precious. Don't sleep your life away, it's full of hidden glory.

Our Christian waiting isn't about endurance. It isn't about wishing our time away until things get better. It's about living hopefully, one moment at a time, knowing that God is always with us and will never let us go, that his light is always in our life.