

May I speak in the name of God, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Today is Advent Sunday, a dark and challenging day in the church's year. The gospel reading for today is always a version of that reading that we've just heard, which has Jesus at his most apocalyptic. He speaks like the Old Testament prophets who give gloomy warnings of extreme weather. So our reading begins, there will be signs in the sun, the moon, and the stars, roaring in the sea and the waves. And when the prophets talk like that, you're not expecting the next sentence to be, and the rest of the country will be partly cloudy with scattered showers. In apocalyptic language, it's bad everywhere. There is no escape.

If I were to ask our Bishop if it was liturgically appropriate to have baptisms on Advent Sunday, I'm sure she'd say no. So guess what? I didn't ask. My dad told me, "Never ask a question to which the answer might be no." So here we are looking forward to baptizing Amelia shortly, and actually I think it's no bad thing to have a baptism on Advent Sunday. I think it brings an interesting perspective to the day.

Both of our readings refer to the coming of Jesus and this isn't a reference to him coming as a baby in Bethlehem, it's a reference to his second coming at the end of time when he will return with power and great glory and establish his new kingdom. And this sense of an end that the world is leading to this great climax of Jesus's return is an important part of Christian teaching. It doesn't get too much attention apart from today in the advent season in churches in the Episcopal tradition, and there are some churches that give it way too much attention, as I discovered, when I went to the end time chronology website. There was a rabbit hole.

But it can't be ignored. This sense of an end is embedded in our creeds and in our liturgy, just listen for it as we carry on with our service. You're here for instance, that as we celebrate the Eucharist, we say we'll do it until He comes. As Christians, we live with a strong sense of an end,

which is a good thing because ends make sense of things. Ends give us a sense of perspective, which can help us to make sense of things. That's why if we read a book, we like to have a good satisfactory end. Well, I do anyway. If I'm reading a thriller, I want everything to fall into place at the end. I want to know who did the dirty deed and why certain people acted in certain ways along the way.

We talk of hindsight, having 20/20 vision, that's because when we look back, we can see why things worked out as they did. Things always look clearer in hindsight. Often when we're in the middle of something, we think oh, I wish I'd known what was going to happen, then I wouldn't have done this. Well, the great thing about the Bible's teaching about the end is that we know how the story of the world will finish. We know that one day Jesus will return. We know that the God who made the world will one day act to bring it to its completion. Nothing in the world will be wasted or go unnoticed. God will bring about his justice when he establishes that great new kingdom.

Now personally, I find this a very encouraging message. I'd hate to think that the world was just drifting along, going round in circles, that one day the world is just going to peter out. I'm encouraged by the idea that God is taking stock and working his purposes out, and that one day there will be a great day of reckoning, when all wrongs will be righted in that glorious new kingdom. The Bible doesn't give much detail about how or when that will happen, we just get snippets like the lovely references we've had in recent weeks' readings to the day when God will wipe away all tears. There will be an end, and that end will give us a perspective from which to view our lives.

We can imagine ourselves in God's new kingdom that He has established at the end of time, looking back on our life. And if we imagine that, then what seems important? How does our life look from the perspective of eternity? What has value from that perspective? These are the questions which we're invited to ponder on Advent Sunday, and they're great questions to think about at a baptism. As we

look ahead into Amelia's future, what are we hoping for? Good friends, good education, satisfying career? What about a life of faith, a sense of hope, a life full of meaning and purpose?

And if these are the things that we want in Amelia's life, then what do we need to be doing now to ensure that that happens? An Advent Sunday invites all of us to ask similar questions of ourselves. In Advent, we are to pay attention to our own lives, to the world around us. So this advent, let's wake up from our materialistic slumber. Let's not forget that another day is coming. Let's watch for the signs of God's kingdom around us, and let's pray this Advent prayer with Robert Herhold. "Come Lord Jesus, come quickly. We do not understand what this means, but don't let that stop you." Amen.