

**Advent Sunday: 2015 (29<sup>th</sup> November)**

**Jer 33:14-16, 1 Thess 3:9-end, Luke 21:25-36**

Mitch Albom wrote a book called 'Tuesdays with Morrie'. It's based on a true story about a college professor who in his later years is struck down with Motor-neurone disease and how Mitch - taught by Morrie twenty years earlier - took time out of his busy schedule to spend Tuesday's with his old professor and mentor. At first he couldn't justify the time to stop and do nothing for a day, but this second chance Mitch had gave him an opportunity to rediscover and rekindle a relationship and it turned into one final class: **lessons on how to live!** It is a wonderful read of how one person even in a broken, disabled and pain filled state was able to help the younger man see the world in a profound way and give him advice on how to navigate through life before he too got older and realized that he had not lived fully.

The reader shares in the insights as Mitch and Morrie meet each Tuesday for months until Morrie can no longer speak; dying soon after. This true story leaves one with a renewed vision of what life is all about, what is important and how we can make the best of every moment we have.

One of the questions Morrie would ask himself as he woke each morning, after giving thanks for waking, was...**is it today?** **Is it today that I will die?** Rather matter-of-factly, before making the best of whatever came his way during the day.

**Is it today?** Who knows...we do not have to be suffering from Motor-neurone disease to die this day...who knows. I wonder though if we were told that this was it...**it is** today, say 5pm, how wonderful the Autumn cold would feel on our skin, how lovely the rain in our face, how welcome and comforting the noises we hear on our way to church. How much we would want to tell someone we love them, forgive some misdemeanor in a fellow Christian or let go of the worries that bind our every day and just breathe in deeply of the world. Even with its polluted air...it'll still feel glorious, absolutely glorious.

**Is it today?** Well in the last few years we have been offered various cinema-graphic views of the world coming to an end. There was 2012. That's was followed by one called Armageddon and the one called 'The Day after Tomorrow' and earlier this year we had 'Interstellar' a lone spaceman tasked with finding a place for us to live because our planet was spent and other global, **we're all gonna die** disaster movies.

We seem fascinated with end times, but as you know Jesus commanded us not to predict the time when he would return (Matt 24:32-35) and it's easy to see why. Some people actually committed suicide across the world because of the film 2012. Hard to believe isn't it, but perhaps they would rather go at their own hand than experience the terror of the violence of the earth's destruction.

I was asked by an anxious 14 year old the other week whether all the troubles in Syria, downed aircraft and Russia being banned from the Olympics meant an end? I said I didn't know and we shouldn't worry about it, but live in the moment.

In Jeremiah today, there is the prediction that Jesus would come of David's line and in Luke the story is about the coming of the Son of Man, Jesus' own term for himself; the parable of the fig tree serving as a metaphor for the end times. When the fig tree sprouts, summer is here, it is as simple as that. Jesus is coming back to earth and when he does the end of the world as we know it will be upon us. What that means though we know not.

Advent means: 'arrival', 'start', 'beginning', 'coming on', 'initiation', 'dawn', introduction. We start our church year at the end of November and the beginning of December. What the end will be like we know not, but what is promised is a new beginning with God, for each end a new beginning with promise. Mahatma Ghandi said this, 'Each night when I go to sleep, I die. And the next morning when I wake up, I am reborn'. Each day is a new opportunity. If it isn't today then tomorrow is a great gift and opportunity to live fully for Christ and to offer to others what we have; ourselves!

Just like the films with their amazing effects showing the violence of the end of the world, Jesus suggests that the end will bring terror to the impenitent (those who will not confess him as Lord) and yet will bring hope to the redeemed. Redemption actually refers to the completion of Christ's work when the unbelieving world will acknowledge that believers are 'Children of God' and will be redeemed. It is quite fascinating because just lately I have noticed a marked increase in material used by comedians on TV which seems to be mocking Christians, mocking God and mocking faithful people in general as if we are all fools using religion as a crutch to prop up our imperfect, broken, empty lives. I couldn't help thinking of Romans 8:19-25 and thinking, laugh all you like...one day you'll be acknowledging I'm a child of God...and then I felt

guilty and prayed they would get it too and be redeemed as well. I shouldn't be thinking ha, you're doomed, but 'How can I help you be saved?'

The season of Advent is an opportunity to remind ourselves about this end time thinking. Jesus in Luke doesn't want us to get lost in lethargy or idly speculating about dates, nor does he want us to neglect our earthly responsibilities because we think it might all be over, so what's the point, well he wants us to be prepared. In a time of indifference and carelessness the Lord will appear with startling suddenness, when that is, is up to the Lord. He wants us to be ready, by changing completely the way we think and live.

How, well Paul shows us through his word to the Thessalonians today **how to** before it is too late. He says that God wants to set us apart, establish us as Holy and blameless; consecrated to him in body and soul; morally dedicated and committed to stand before him and meeting his approval. How...well Paul just shows his desire for the Thessalonians to abound in love for each other more and more. Love as God has loved us that he would give his life for us on the cross, Love as God has loved us in the breaking of his body and the shedding of his blood. Love as God has loved us in that while we are still sinners he saved us through total cost to himself.

Morrie spoke gently to Mitch through his discomfort and dying voice, 'Remember what I said about finding a meaningful life? devote yourself to loving others, devote yourself to your community around you and devote yourself to creating something that gives you purpose and meaning' He grinned as he said, 'You'll notice Mitch there's nothing in there about a salary'. He went onto say, 'I'm dying right?'

'Yes!'

'Well giving to other people is what makes me feel alive. When I can make someone smile when they're sad, it's as close to feeling healthy as I ever feel'. Morrie died as he lived, loving others, sharing with others, offering himself for others. His epitath read, 'A teacher to the end'. He taught Mitch to abound in love.

Loving is forgiving yourself, then forgiving others completely, it's spending time fully in the presence of someone else that they know they have your total undivided attention, it's doing something that only you can do to make someone life a little easier; it's also doing something for someone that everyone can do, but perhaps because they do not. Loving is being in the

here and now, breathing in the wonderful creation that God has given us, feeling alive and yet accepting our death in the knowledge that this end provides a glorious new beginning when we shall be called the sons and daughters of God.

Morrie whispers to Mitch, 'Everyone knows they are going to die, but nobody believes it, if we did we would do things differently'.

'So we kid ourselves about death', said Mitch.

'Yes, but there's a better approach. To know you're going to die and to be prepared for it at any time'. 'That's better'. 'That way you can actually be more involved in your life, while you're living'.

Can we ask ourselves, 'Is it today? Am I doing all I need to do? Am I being the person I want to be? Jesus is teaching us in the Advent reading that when we learn how to die, we learn profoundly how to live. We become more spiritual, we appreciate everything, we see things as if we're seeing them for the first time.

This life, created and given by God is an Advent~ure, a quest, an exploration into a closer relationship with God that sees us abounding in love and further set apart; Holy and blameless in readiness for his second coming and our complete redemption. Ever ready, ever prepared and ever released to live fully in that knowledge.

As a church and as individuals we shall know when we have this right, when we realize that we have established a pattern of giving generously of ourselves, of our money, of our time, of our very lives... in the service of Christ and for the benefit of His mission to the community we serve here in Birstall and Wanlip.

Our mission is to help those who don't know God, those who don't want God and even those who mock God, to find him through us, through our words, through our actions and to be redeemed themselves. We can do this by abounding in love, more and more and in doing so we will be ready when he comes again.

Is it today? Probably not, but it will be one day...He promised. In the mean time I will remember that this is the day that the Lord has made. I will rejoice and be glad in it, every moment, every breath, every heartbeat.

### **Let us pray**

Lord you are in every heartbeat, let our hearts be open to you and to all others that your Holy Spirit may find us ready when you come in glory. Take us and use us and set us apart as the redeemed. In your precious name.

**Amen.**

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