*The LCA provides this sermon edited for lay-reading, with thanks to the original author.*

**Advent 1C**

**Luke 21:25-36**

*Dear heavenly Father, send your Holy Spirit on us so that we might stay alert and watch for the coming One, our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.*

How many of you start to get a little frustrated at this time of year?

Today is the 1st Sunday of Advent. Here in the church, we look to the coming of the Christ, our Messiah. We have hymns and songs that look forward to his coming or his returning, giving us a new beginning. The candles are lit each Sunday which countdown to his coming. The colours are purple, a royal colour to welcome the King into our lives, but also a colour of repentance as we acknowledge our need for a Saviour to save us from our sin.

But that’s only here in church. For one hour this week, or perhaps a little more if we’re using any Advent devotions, we celebrate the Advent of our King, the coming of Christ into our weary and broken world, yet what do we get for the other 167 hours this week?

Well, it’s mostly about Christmas, but not the Christian Christmas. It’s all about the commercial Christmas – the Christmas that sells toys by the trolley load, electrical gadgets and tools by the boot load; the Christmas that has children excited about chubby men in red costumes, and the Christmas that, according to a recent Woolworths advertisement, is “all about family, fun, and fresh food”.

I can’t wait for the time when the angels will announce peace on earth in a few weeks time, because right now, it seems we’re under attack. For example, Christmas carols are invading our eardrums in shops. Christmas lights have been overrunning gardens and houses. Shop windows and shelves have been infected with Christmas trees and shiny bells. Christmas specials have been overtaking television broadcasts. Empty spaces in shopping malls are now occupied by hundreds of Father Christmas’s and their helpers. Even our calendars have been overtaken by Christmas preparations and celebrations.

In church, we celebrate the Advent of our King, but the shops celebrate the advent of the mighty dollar. Christmas carols and other sentimental songs are already being played in shops, but we only start singing the arrival of Christ after Christmas. Where we celebrate Christmas from the 25th of December, that’s when they finish. You see, while for us today is the 1st Sunday of Advent, for them it’s already about the 5th Sunday of Christmas, and they’ve got another three or four to go!

So, why don’t we just go with the flow and change what the church does to fit in with society?

While there are many possible answers, when was the last time you heard God say to his people ‘just try to fit in with the people about you and do what they do’?

Despite my frustration, this is the way it is. In fact, this is the way it always is and should be. This is what Jesus is talking about. As people of God, we’re to do and see things differently.

When there are earthquakes and terrifying events in people’s lives and everyone else is cowering in fear, we lift our heads and look to our coming One. When everyone else is anxious about so many things to do or getting drunk at Christmas parties, we stay awake and alert. When everyone else looks at Christmas trees, we look to the fig tree as an example of expectation and anticipation.

Christ tells us to look differently at things, or rather, to look for different things that no-one else is looking for.

For example, when things seem the darkest, scariest and most frightening and most people are watching terror and despair, we look elsewhere. We lift our heads to see the coming of our Saviour! Unlike the rest of the world which cowers or runs away in fear, we have hope. We have a Saviour. Knowing this, we watch for our coming salvation. We’re like sentries holding the fort, waiting and anticipating our rescue. We’re to be in a constant state of alertness for his coming.

When people are partying and emptying their wallets and purses, we look to the coming of Christ. When people light up their houses, we look to the coming of our Saviour – the Light of the world – into a darkened, broken, and weary world. When people point to men in Santa costumes, we look to and point to the coming of our Immanuel – our God in human flesh.

We are tempted to stop watching and waiting in anticipation. The rest of the world is spending and making money, going to parties, and getting drunk. We don’t like to miss out. We don’t like it that we don’t quite fit in with their way of life. It’s easier to go along with the flow. Let’s party. Let’s buy. Let’s celebrate now. Let’s not wait. Let’s not stay alert. Let’s give up meeting together. After all, there’ll be plenty of warning when Jesus comes again, won’t there?

But how much warning is given to a car accident victim, or someone who suffers from a heart attack, or a drug overdose, or some other unexpected tragedy?

These days we’re so busy with Christmas celebrations and things to do before Christmas. Late nights and drinking dulls our alertness, yet as the Lord approaches we are to be alert and watchful! Unfortunately, many Christians are giving up their watching posts.

This call of advent watching is even more important now than ever before. Do you realise we’re closer to the Day of the Lord than any other time in history? Yet many have abandoned their watching posts for the sake of fun, or because they’ve given up on their watching through apathy, or because the worries and anxieties of life have taken over. The Church sentry posts are being emptied as people look away from the Lord’s coming.

But still the call rings out loud and clear: we’re to watch for, expect, and anticipate our Saviour’s coming! We’re to watch for the signs of his coming again in glory, which may be at any time. Unlike others, we don’t look to Christmas as a time of shopping, partying, or financial ruin through gift giving, instead we look forward to Christ’s coming, and how he *already* comes into our crazy, mixed up, and broken world.

We already look to his coming through his Word. He comes through the Church to speak his words of warning and his words of peace to you according to your situation. For example, if you’ve become lazy in your watchfulness, he may call you back to your post with a warning from his Word. Or, if you face a shaky future and feel threatened by the world that crumbles around you, he may comfort you by his call to confidently stand and witness the coming of your rescuer, your Saviour Jesus Christ.

He also comes to you in his Sacraments. He comes in his flesh and blood to reassure you of his love, his forgiveness and his ever-abiding presence. He comes to share his peace and his life with you as you sit at the table with your all your loved ones who are joined to Jesus through faith.

In this way, when troubles surround you and threaten to overtake you, you look for Jesus to come near you and save you from your troubles and your misery. When family tragedy strikes, you look to Jesus to come to strengthen you, carry you, and bring you peace. When you feel victimised by others, you look for Jesus to come near and rescue you from your enemies. When shame and disgrace covers you, you look for Jesus to come and free you from your guilt through his forgiveness and cleansing. When death stares you or a loved one in the face, you look for Jesus to come and rescue you from the despair of death.

You see, Jesus has come into the world in his flesh at Bethlehem, he will come again in glory, and he still comes to you today through his Word, through his Sacraments, and through the actions and words of his people. Knowing this, you look for his coming. You constantly watch for his coming in the past, the future, and the present.

There’s no other way to prepare for the coming of the Lord except to stay alert and watch. Therefore, don’t give up the sentry post. Keep watch, be alert, but don’t be alarmed when he comes now and in the future. As watchers in faith, this isn’t a time to be afraid or anxious, worried by cosmic or personal events, or to be caught up with the commercialisation or drunken parties of Christmas, but a time to lift your heads in confidence as you see your Lord and Saviour coming in glory, coming to rescue you and to raise you into his glory. As we confidently wait for and watch for our coming Lord, may…

*…the peace of God, which surpasses all human understanding, guard our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.*