

# The Potter and the Clay

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[ 0 : 00 ]     Once upon a time, there was a small box that sat in the middle of your living room. It came in black and white.

And it was only on for a few hours every day. And you'd have, almost like the Bible sat beside it for some, called the Radio Times. And you would wait for your favourite programme to come on, albeit Andy Pandy or Muffin the Mule.

But in between, you would get an interesting interlude. And it would look something like this. There's a thing called the Potter's Wheel. And I don't know whether you remember them.

There were several ones where you would get this interlude of black and white, of somebody moulding the clay. And it was lovely because there was an anticipation, because you knew that something was coming while this thing was being moulded away.

My goodness, we're all showing our age this morning. For anybody here, young people, look it up on YouTube. I was thinking there has to be a biblical imperative.

[ 1 : 17 ]     Let's just have a think. Because while we're waiting for this thing, we're waiting for something that is really exciting in this thing of Advent. And while we're waiting, what are the things that are most important to you?

And I'm challenged because I'm going to ask you a question. If you had to leave your house quickly, what are the three things that you would grab before you go?

Now, just a bit of advice here. If you are a married couple here, the first one is to say, you my sweet, not the dog, and not your insurance policy.

Okay. So I'm just going to ask you, three things that you would take if you had to grab them to go quickly. I will give you a minute just to talk or think amongst yourselves as to what those three things might be.

The thing is, the imperative is, is that this reading this morning, the first of Advent, makes me think, what is important to us? What is the most important thing as we move into this time, this time of anticipation?

[ 2 : 28 ]     Also, a bit of an interlude to actually think and focus on what is God's imperative. What is important to us?

But most importantly, what is important in our relationship with God? Because this Advent, in time of reflection, expectation, excitement, my goodness, if you had been in fact this morning, the children were wound like a spring already.

I don't know who was more excited, them or me. And as we look forward to experiencing this thing that the church, as we as a church, are getting ready for, as we look forward to celebrating this life-changing moment of Emmanuel, God with us, it made me think, so what is important to God?

because we can all think of what is important to us, but what is important to God as we move towards this Advent season?

What is so important that he was prepared to send and sacrifice his son to save us? My goodness, to think that we are the first thing that he would think about saving.

[ 3 : 51 ]     Never mind everything else, never mind what else, we were the ones that he was thinking about. And what was that made him so important, so much that he would become flesh, that he would become a child, and you don't get any more vulnerable than a child, to come into this world in order to engage with our humanity, in order to save that which was precious, which is us, which is you and me, which is the ones he actually came to save.

That focuses me in this interlude because we can't ignore it. And you may say in the light of the news, are we worth saving?

You know, I looked at that last night and I looked, my goodness. But yet he still doesn't give up. That he chooses you and me in a rebellious world to come.

And here is Isaiah pouring out what is still as fresh today as it was then for a people who had turned away from God. And God says, actually I'm going to come and do something about that for you.

And here it is, there are places found in this reading and confession, you know, that we are like filthy rags. My goodness, it doesn't get any clearer than that in a context of what Isaiah was speaking to.

[ 5 : 12 ]     And yet, he still comes to save us. Israel's desire for God to tear open the heavens and come down, to tear open and suddenly have this huge awakening.

And here it is in Jesus. Here is the answer to prayer. Here is the answer to Isaiah's desire. Here is the answer to God's desire, the coming of Jesus. The coming of Jesus in a manger.

The coming of Jesus to judge the world. The coming of Jesus so that we can have kingdom values. The coming of Jesus so that we can have hope and a life.

And God says, it's okay, let's do it. It's okay, Isaiah, let's do it then. And that's when it happens.

And if your prayer like mine is, let's make a difference to the community, then be encouraged in this Advent because God says in this reading and to Isaiah and to us, okay then, let's do it.

[ 6 : 18 ]     Let's do this thing together because God's work of salvation hasn't stopped and we are still part of the salvation story. So what's our part?

What is most important to us when God says, let's do it? Perhaps your heart this Advent is to inspire and ignite the community in which you work and live.

Every day might seem mundane but for something to come, light the candle to ignite something that's afresh in you and in us and in our community.

What does that take for us to do? And I'm so inspired by people who have done that in life like John Wesley.

John Wesley who decided that to spark a nation he would actually get out of the church and would go and preach outside of mines and in works of people's workplaces.

[ 7 : 28 ]     He saw transformation of life because he was called out of what he was doing and people got the spark and they saw revival. And it says come down ignite the world in revival rend the heavens break out and make a difference and people did.

He preached so much that the workers who had previously gone with their wages and just drunk them at the end of the day suddenly went home and saw a new way of doing life and because of that family life was transformed family life was changed.

The culture of this country shifted and I don't know about you that's what I think I want to see a shift I think we all want to see a shift a shift in what is new of what God can do in us and through us and I know this is a strange concept but the important things to me aren't the material things it was people like Wesley and others that were inspired by this shift that we can see that we can be part of and you might be saying that how can we do that for part of my 60th birthday present Mandy bought me a ticket to go and see Love Actually live I don't know whether you've seen it it's amazing if you get the chance to go they have a full orchestra at the Colston Hall and you watch the film but the orchestra play the music you don't know what to watch the film or the orchestra but the whole essence of looking at that film afresh was love actually is still alive and real and I think sometimes the world needs to know this issue about that love is all around it's just that we need to connect with it this weekend there will be an amazing opportunity to show love you've had a dedicated team that have already been doing a lot of planning and this place will be full of Christmas trees and people will come people will talk people will celebrate if you were here last Sunday you would have witnessed the baptism that was here why?

because somebody was invited and came to a Christmas tree festival they came they sat at the back and because of that for them there was a reigniting and awakening in their lives and Steve Hargreaves and his children were baptised together what a glorious celebration that was the thing is there is this reignition of hope within our community that starts with us and we think it's difficult but it's not it's about love actually and all we need to do is be alongside people and show them God's love to speak with them to share with them to smile at them to encourage them to tell them the good news that they actually really want to hear because desperately they know there's something missing and my goodness does this country know that there's something missing if I hear Brexit again on the radio

I think no the tower's not tall enough but it's you know it's just my goodness we need some hope and some encouragement and in that 1950s intermission in the interlude perhaps something we need again in our lives is to realise that there's this anticipation and expectation of something coming at the end of the day the message of Advent is what was God's priority what was God's priority and what will our be priority in this interlude I pray on this first day of Advent that we would go away from here thinking and praying what our priority is and our priority is to carry on salvation's work to see people come to know him I will tell you again I can't carry people into the kingdom of God it's not our job but what we can do is we can introduce people to Jesus and that's what we're called to do