

# The Coming of the Son of Man

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Preacher: Bishop Don Harvey

[ 0 : 0 0 ] May the words of my lips and the meditations of our hearts be always acceptable in thy sight, O Lord, our strength and our Redeemer. Amen.

I want to thank the Rector for his warm welcome this morning and for the opportunity of being able to be here on what is almost the first anniversary of my appointment as the moderator of the Anglican Network in Canada to be able to share in this service with you.

I was here at nine o'clock and met a number of people at the door and now I look over this sea of faces. You should try it sometime up this pulpit looking down at the congregation and how rewarding it is to see them before you and to realize what a privilege it is to be able to stand in this pulpit where over the years so many marvelous sermons proclaiming the word of God and the message of salvation went forth and where so many people responded to it.

I don't take that invitation, joy to be here likely, and I pray this morning that I will be given eloquence to be able to proclaim a message and that you will have the grace to receive it.

I want in particular to thank you here at St. John's for showing me, even during this, my first official visit, your greatest treasure.

[ 1 : 4 0 ] I don't mean as great a treasure as it is this great church filled with people twice in a row this morning. I don't mean as great a treasure. I don't mean as great a treasure.

I don't mean as great a treasure, I don't mean as beautiful musical program that you use to lead people into worship. Your greatest treasure, dearly beloved, these group of children who came up here this morning before the rector with such eager expectant faces to hear the word from him as they went forward then for their own part of the service.

don't ever take for granted what a treasure that is. I had the pleasure of attending a meeting, I guess it was last summer or the summer before that.

They all meld together into one in Dallas, Texas. We sat there around the table all day discussing the future of the communion and the work of our church, both in Canada and in the United States.

And it was, in many ways, a very difficult and depressing meeting. At the end of the meeting, one of the bishops went out and came in with his little granddaughter, eight months old, tucked into his arms.

[ 3 : 0 0 ] She was of Italian extract with beautiful black curly hair and these bright little black eyes staring up at this strange wonderment of all these men in purple shirts sitting around the table.

I often wonder what must have been going through the little mind. But as he walked around with her, he said, Look, sweetheart, I want you to see those people who are trying to make sure that there's going to be a church here for you when you grow up.

And I'll never forget that because it suddenly made all those endless hours of working, those times of praying for something that seemed futile, seemed very worthwhile.

And if you ever get tired in well-doing, and I pray you won't here at St. John's, Shaughnessy, just think of this treasure that you have there and the opportunity you are responding to to make sure that the church that was passed on to you when you accepted Christ will be there for them as well as they get older.

Never take it for granted. I want to greet you on behalf of the Anglican Network in Canada and to thank you for the...

[ 4 : 16 ] I think we used this imagery before, but it's worth using again, especially on Advent Sunday when we're lighting candles and so on, for the spark you kindled not just for Canada, but for the Anglican world.

And I have attended a number of international meetings where it has been acknowledged by primates, but especially our friends across the border, the courage that you gave when you...

that you gave them when you decided against so many odds and against so much popular opinion to take a stand for the faith and to witness to Jesus Christ in the way you have.

And I said to someone in the break between the two services, although the tunnel before us is still long. I don't want to kid you about that. It's still long. It's still treacherous. It has many mishaps concealed in it.

But from where I sit, the light at the end of that tunnel, which never went out, is growing much more strongly than it did this time last year. And I pray that you will keep up your courage.

[ 5 : 18 ] And I believe that this New Year's Day we are celebrating because Advent Sunday in the church calendar is its New Year's Day. This New Year in the church will be one where you will see the results of so many of the seeds that you planted over the last few very difficult years.

God bless you for that and thank you for the courage you have given us in so many other parts of the church in this country of Canada. One of the traditions of our Anglican church is to use a calendar.

And I hope no matter how we change in the future we will retain that because taking Christ's life and dividing episodes in it up into the 12 months of the year enables us to not just focus on those things we like, those things which are comfortable, but also requires us to talk about things sometimes that are anything but that.

And so the season of Advent, the season of coming, brings us into the first segment of the year as we prepare ourselves for the anniversary of his birth, which is less than a month away now.

Now, the colleague for today, which we heard the rector pray on our behalf, Almighty God, give us grace that we may cast away the works of darkness and put upon us the armor of light.

[ 6 : 51 ] Whenever I hear that, think of my boyhood back in Newfoundland at a time when people in our economic strata, which was far from poverty, but nevertheless was modest, never enjoyed the luxury of central heating, which meant you had to get up on a cold morning to a house that had cooled off all night.

And someone, usually the dad and the family, had to go down and strike a match to light the paper, to light the splits or the kindling, to light the coal, to get the house warm.

And I can still recall many mornings when I knew when the alarm clock went off I had to get up and go to school. But the temptation, as I heard the wind swirling outside the house and the freezing rain, the glitter we call it, hitting on the windowpane, freezing on there, and dreading the fact that in a moment or two you had to cast off those blankets and put your feet out onto the cold canvas, as we called it, or the norium, or whatever the covering of the floor was, and go out to face the day.

And I guess because that was so unpleasant, that shock of reality, the blankets seemed more enticing than ever. Oh, how good to snuggle down there and hear the wind outside and say, I'm secure.

And it took a great act of will to cast off the blankets and to get out and to jump from one foot to another as you found your stockings and tried to get comfortable.

[ 8 : 25 ] Once you had made that break, once you got up, it was much easier. You were glad you did it then. You had the whole day before you. But that initial act of will to get out into the cold comes to my mind as we talk about casting off the works of darkness.

Because the works of darkness, unfortunately, are so inviting. Or at least they seem to be inviting. They seem to promise us something which, in the long run, they can never deliver.

But at least the enticement is there. And so, the Church gives us these four Sundays before Christmas, the Sundays of Advent, to prepare ourselves.

And it's very difficult to use them these days. We always look back and say, when I was a boy, when I was a girl, things were different. And I guess ever since Eve became a grandmother, people talked that way. But it's still, in a world today where celebrating Christmas starts right after Halloween, and you go into store after store now and hear all this music being played.

And the first few times you hear it as grand as bringing back all your Christmas memories. By the time Christmas Eve comes, you're about ready to scream if you've got to hear some of this played over those loudspeaker systems again.

[ 9 : 43 ] And to realize that in actual fact, those who compiled the Church calendar thought that none of this would start until December 24th. Prior to that, you were preparing for it.

It was a solemn season. It was a vigil. It was a fast. The color is purple. Expectation and repentance. And I have given up the battle of trying to, you know, call the Church back from celebrating Christmas until Christmas Day because it is a futile one and it's not really a necessary one.

I do believe now it is possible for us to live in the world and it is possible to start having, going to Christmas parties anytime after the first of December and still observe Advent in your own particular way.

But it means you've got to concentrate on it more and you've got to find unique ways to be able to live in the world and at the same time be not of the world. Advent, these four Sundays, traditionally called us to think about four things in the Church.

they were called the four last things. And if we were to have a little contest here this morning, and I know many of you are cradle Anglicans and others have adopted it since, what the four last things are, how many people could successfully get all four of them, though they're quite simple and you'd know them but you mightn't know them under that particular topic or heading.

[ 11 : 15 ] Well, here they are. You always wanted to find out. Death, the last thing for all of us here more than likely, death, judgment, heaven, hell.

And of these four, number three is the only one we spend a lot of time thinking about and talking about as we hope we're preparing for it. But unless the second coming comes in our lifetime and it may well, it may come before the end of the day but we don't know and there's no way for us to know the inevitability of death faces all of us and it puts quite a dread on some people.

Even Christian people have difficulty sometimes coming to terms with what death is. This is not the sermon where I'd like to explore that with you but nevertheless I want to remind you of the inevitability of it for most of us.

We are going to die. And although the words of the atheist are sometimes comforting that when you die it's just oblivion forever are often there.

That is not obviously the Christian philosophy or doctrine. But please remember that death in the Christian doctrine is followed by judgment.

[ 12 : 37 ] And just as inevitably as we will die so we will be judged. Jesus Christ makes this very plain right throughout his teaching in all four gospels St. Paul reinforces it.

We will be judged. And it's not going to be one of those great happy things that God's love is so great that no matter what you did no matter what you accepted or didn't accept his love is so great he will encompass you all when that time comes.

this is not the teaching of Jesus. Jesus says instead at that time at that coming of the Son of Man you are going to be separated like a shepherd would separate his flocks and he will put the sheep on the one side the goats on the other and they will be judged you will be judged I will be judged this is the message of Advent this is the because it is the message of Jesus Christ and he says that those who have followed him through his grace will inherit eternal life and reign with him forever in glory and the part we don't like to hear and the modern version of Christianity and the modern version of Anglicanism does what it can to shut it out but there is also a hell and we don't try to explain the imagery of hell in as much as we can tell you that hell at its worst is a separation from the knowledge and love of God we will never experience that throughout all eternity and that has to be one of the greatest hells one can imagine between the two services this morning

I was telling your rector about a poem that strikes me very forcibly and often when I have the time you'll be relieved to know I haven't got the time this morning so you're not going to be subjected to a long poem but it's a poem that describes the judgment day and it describes the punishment of those who haven't done the right things as having to look into the eyes of Jesus Christ and see all the bad things you ever did reflected in them and Jesus says the dirty things you did to them the people you misused during life the dirty things you did to them the things you thought were fine you did it all to me he said for their souls were mine and he finishes up his poem by saying and friends I rather shrivel up in the hottest kind of hell than to have to look into his eyes and hear him answer well you and I will look into those eyes one day and we will be accountable not just for the things we're so proud of but for the things that have made him so sad and have suffered so much but and I use that word a lot this morning but for the Christian the Advent season calls us to repentance so that any of those dreadful things we did the filthy things we did the unclean things we did can be forgiven so readily and so easily if we come to his feet and say

Jesus I'm sorry I'm dreadfully sorry I did those things and I hope with your grace I will live my life in such a way that I will not do them again that's called repentance our church across Canada has been called to repent for the wrong direction in which we have been moving for our ignoring of the gospel of Jesus Christ and to take these scriptures and to try to rewrite them and to reword them in a way that will make us popular with the rest of the culture people say oh in the 21st century you've got to interpret the Bible Bible in light of the age we're living in and the devil never planted a firmer lie into our hearts than when he convinces us of that because interpreting the Bible does not mean what the word interpret means when they say interpret the Bible they're saying to us rewrite the Bible write it leave out the passages you don't like and interpret the other ones so that it will condone the things that the culture we are living in say are so very important the word repentance apparently comes from a

[ 17 : 26 ] Greek word which means not just say I'm sorry but it means turn around face the other direction make a complete change of course as it were if you're driving a car I suppose the closest thing to it would be make a U-turn go back in the direction that you should be going in and we are called upon to do that John the Baptist came out of the wilderness after preparing himself he came out looking like a pretty wild character with flying hair and animals skiing around his shoulders he had never shaved in his life as part of the order he apparently joined and as he came out looking I suppose sometimes like a maniac to some people he had the one message on his lips he says repent change around the kingdom of heaven is at hand and the kingdom of heaven was so close to him his cousin in a way his earthly cousin Jesus Christ who was there and John wondering if that is the real

Christ or not ultimately is convinced that it is and he called upon the established church I still get cold shivers down my spine when I think of how John had the courage to turn to the bishops if they were bishops they weren't bishops but they were the equivalent of bishops in the Jewish church the high priests to the scribes and the Pharisees and to not just say you should perhaps reconsider what you're doing he turns to them and he says you generation of vipers who warned you to flee from the wrath to come he tackled it head on and he called the people to repent and be baptized with water Jesus Christ himself though without sin condoned that call by himself submitting to that baptism so we are called upon to repent as a church but we are also my friends as we are aware called upon to repent individually and there's not one person in this church and especially not the preacher who does not have to repent on a frequent basis for falling far short of what is required of them to be the followers of Jesus and until we make that peace with

God and get this burden off our backs we will find it very difficult to be able to reach out and to help others yesterday I came from attending an essentials meeting in Calgary been here all week in Vancouver went to Calgary for the meeting came back last evening when we got on the flight in Calgary got the message that you hear every time you get on a flight you know how to use a seat belt keep your seat back in upright position all those things but then the flight attendant usually comes on and says should oxygen become necessary in this flight a mask will drop from the unit above you think about it the next time you fly it says take the mask and hold firmly fix it over your mouth and nose and then breathe normally and then the flight attendant goes on to say if you need to assist another person in having their mask put on put on your own first and then help the other person the implication is if you're turning purple or blue whatever the color is from lack of oxygen you're not going to be much help to me if I need you to put on my mask for me and this is why we are recalled to individual repentance why we are called upon in order to be able to spread the message of Christ to be able to live it and we can only live that message when we are able to purge ourselves from the many things we have done wrong and the message of Jesus

Christ is so wonderful there because it goes out to all of us just turn to me and be saved there's no great complicated formula to it there's no great amount of money that has to be paid indeed it's the freest thing in this world it's our salvation because although it was costly the price was paid in full when the Immaculate Son of God hung on the cross and took your sins and mine and had them nailed to that cross and he died to take our punishment and all we have to say is yes Jesus I believe that I'm grateful you have taken my sin and I want now as I prepare for your coming whether it's you coming here on earth in this great glorious second coming or if indeed you call me before that to join you out of earth whichever way it is doesn't make much difference the important thing is that I know that my sins have been forgiven

I know that simply by reaching out my hand and putting it in yours I can have eternal life it's so available that we sometimes don't we sometimes take it for granted the concept of forgiveness has to be at the heart of our repentance because we know by turning to him we will receive it there a few years ago the Juno awards were held in St.

[ 23 : 06 ] John's and what the hoopla you probably get more of this in Vancouver it's a more hospitable climate to have great events but every now and then we have something like that in St.

John's that means your church to you when I say St. John's I mean Newfoundland where I live I'm glad I thought of clarifying that anyway the Juno awards came to St.

John's and the CBC were down there with cameras going all over the place microphones held out and they came across this young lady probably about 15-16 years of age and she was ecstatic she was hopping up and down and he said what are you so excited about and he said well I just saw Shaggy I didn't know who Shaggy was but I thought it was a dog sounded like a nice name for that and she was she was so out of herself because this rock star smiled at her and I suggest to you that years down the road if she tells that story to her children her grandchildren or her great grandchildren they'll shrug their shoulders and say well who are you talking about but if she can turn to them and say on such and such a date I gave my life to Jesus Christ what a difference that makes because not only will she have done something tangible in that way but she'll do something that's memorable because her children and her grandchildren will see a life that has been changed and that has been different

Fanny Crosby's wonderful hymn to God be the glory great things he has done has the marvelous line in it which I just find so reassuring the new hymn book hasn't left this line changed in it it doesn't like to call a spade a spade but Fanny Crosby wrote she says the vilest offender the vilest offender who truly believes that moment from Jesus a pardon receives isn't it just overwhelming that Jesus saves us in this manner I told the story at the last service which I want to tell again of the Roman Catholic cardinal in the Philippines who unfortunately had to live with the name the surname of Sin S-I-N Cardinal Sin welcome to my church I'm Cardinal Sin but in spite of the name that he was saddled with

I won't say he was a sinless man because none of us are but he was certainly a courageous valiant Christian who did much to improve both the church and the community in which he lived and the story is told and it is a true one that at one point his assistants came to him and said there's a woman out here your eminence who claims that Jesus Christ appears to her on a regular basis and she talks to him like I'm talking to you the cardinal was curious and he said well bring her in let me hear what she has to say so she came in before him this little woman from the Philippines and he said they tell me that Jesus Christ comes to you is that true and she said yes your eminence is true he said they tell me that Jesus Christ talks to you and tells you things is that true yes your eminence that's true so the cardinal got a bit mischievous and said well you go out and the next time that Jesus Christ comes to you you ask him a question you ask him to tell you the three greatest sins that I the cardinal ever committed and she said okay and she left the cardinal got quite a shock when two days later his assistants came in and said that woman she's out there and she got a message for you and I guess the cardinal started thinking about some of the wild oats he may have sown

[ 27 : 06 ] I'm just guessing about what would happen if it were my case and she was escorted in and he said listen is it true that Jesus came to you yes your eminence well did you ask him the question I asked you to put to him yes your eminence I did I asked him what were your three greatest sins so the cardinal took a deep breath and said what did Jesus say and she said tell his eminence that what I have forgiven I have forgotten and that's a word of encouragement such a such a strong word of encouragement to all of us as we stand here at this beginning of Advent to contemplate a new year in the church and to celebrate the coming of Christ but to prepare for the second coming of the son of man on the earth forgiveness repentance those things are so wonderful and I want you to leave this these words mine with this picture that some of you if you grew up in the era

I grew up in would have been familiar next to the Bible with John Bunyan's Pilgrim's Progress and in Pilgrim's Progress Christian is an allegory is walking along and there's a burden there's a pack sack on his back and the pack sack gets heavier as he walks through life because the pack sack represents the sins he's carrying on his shoulder and as he moves it gets heavier and heavier and it reaches the stage where it's almost dragging him down he wonders if he can go on any further and he has this great hill to climb and he takes a deep breath and says well I'll give it a try even though this burden on my back is stopping me from doing it and so he climbs and climbs he comes to the pinnacle of the hill just up to the top completely exhausted when he gets there he looks up and there are three crosses on the crown of the hill and on the center cross there's a figure hanging with arms outstretched droplets of blood falling from the hands and from the feet and Christian looks up into the eyes of that figure on the cross their eyes meet and he feels this sense of serenity coming over him and at that moment this great terrible burden that was on his shoulders breaks away and it rolls over and over and over and over down the hillside till it comes to the mouth of an opal sepulcher where it falls and Christian says

I saw it no more that my friends and I use the word friends I hope in the way Jesus used it as we come together trying to be his followers that that same experience if you haven't already experienced it is available even this day for you and for me that this burden which hinders us from being the kind of ambassador he wants us to be the kind of ambassador he needs us to be this burden will disappear forever and we will be able to move forward in his name the sin the great sin affecting your church and mine today is complacency and apathy too many people across this land are using the old ostrich syndrome of putting their head into the sand and saying everything is going to be alright some of our bishops some of our primates are saying peace peace but there's no peace there's no peace unless we come to the truth in Christ and this thing will not cure itself the danger that you stood up for five years ago is never going to get better unless other people take that same stand and stand up for the same thing

I started my sermon in the last service it may seem to you I'm going on so long that the last one has gone right on into this one but an advent reminds us by the way that time is passing we haven't got all the time we think we might have but I started it by the words I'm going to finish this one John Wesley great preacher who brought thousands of souls into a living experience with Jesus Christ occasionally wrote his sermons mostly he preached them on horseback and everywhere else wherever the spirit moved him and even then they were so spirit filled that they had an amazing effect but when he wrote them when he prepared a message at the beginning of each book that he wrote a sermon he always put down two little lines which I want to leave in your minds today the words were this he says

I preach as never sure to preach again and as a dying man to dying men now forget about the non-inclusive language John Wesley realized when he said men he meant everybody nothing to do with the male gender but he saw himself as perhaps having this as the only opportunity ever again to preach to a congregation and he knew that everyone in that congregation was in the same state he was we were dying he wanted to leave a message to them the urgency of it so that when they died they would then really and only then be ready to live may this advent be a time when we embrace that same message when we live not a new life but as the book of common prayer says the new life in Christ which is there for us and so that when in four weeks time we celebrate his birthday we will say thank you Lord for the gift of Jesus we are ready for his second coming come Lord Jesus come quickly amen let's bow our heads in prayer almighty God give us grace to cast off the works of darkness and put on the armor of light and in so doing enable us to be strengthened and sustained by your holy word by your grace and by your holy spirit dwelling in us that we may be your ambassadors preaching your word to fellow dying creatures the message of hope the message of salvation the message of new life which can only come from you and this we ask in Jesus holy name amen