

Knox Uniting Church Cluster. “Cluster Service”

Sunday November 30th, 2025 – (RCL: Year A. Advent 1.) First Sunday of Advent

Sermon (reflection) by Russell Croxford at Ferntree Gully Uniting Service

Bible passages: Isaiah 2:1-5. Romans 13:11-12. Matthew 24:42-44

“Don’t miss the sunrise”

Last Saturday morning I was still in bed sleeping, when at 5:50am I stirred and became aware of an orange glow filling the room. I opened my eyes and saw, through the window this gloriously stunning orange sunrise filling the sky. I wasn’t ready to get up at that point, so I reached over, grabbed my phone, took a snap, and fell straight back to sleep. [The picture on the screen is that photo I took].

I’m glad I didn’t miss it, but it made we wonder how many times I do miss lovely sunrises because I’m still asleep – especially in the summer months when they occur so early. The only way to enjoy a sunrise is to be awake and not sleeping in!

There is a lesson in this about Christian discipleship. The only way to really appreciate what God is doing is to be ‘awake’ and ‘present’ in a metaphorical sense. We’ve got to ‘be there’ to see what God is up to and to have any chance of being part of it.

Woody Allen is quoted as saying, “80 per cent of success is *showing up*”. In other words, our skills and talents matter a little bit, but the main thing is turning up and being there – being available. To show up and see the light and colour of the sunrise. To see what God is doing – often through me, maybe often in spite of me!

In our Romans reading today, Paul writes, “You know what time it is, how it is already the moment for you to wake from sleep... the night is far gone; the day is near. Let us then throw off the works of darkness and put on the armour of light”. (Rom 13:11-12). Paul is using themes of sleeping/waking, night/day, darkness/light, to remind us to be awake and be people of the light. This means being in the places where God’s light needs to shine in the darkness of the world.

Today we are celebrating 100 years of this church. That’s 100 years of people just showing up. Just being present and available for God to use – with the added bonus of being in places where they could see many ‘glorious sunrises’ of people’s lives being renewed and transformed in all sorts of ways.

But we need to realise that this 100 year story isn’t over. Yes, there is much to celebrate about the past. And there is an exciting future ahead, albeit it a bit daunting. But I want to suggest today that what matters most in the church story is what’s happening in the story right *now!*

As we come to another season of Advent we again focus on the way the ‘coming’ of Jesus gives us great hope. Of course that includes his coming as a baby in Bethlehem, and all the ways he’s come since then. And it does mean expecting him to come again, in all the ways, times and places he will come – including the big one – that is, the ‘second coming’ (or ‘Parousia’). But the hope of Advent is mostly about how Jesus is coming *now...* in this church...in my life, in your life, and in our neighbourhoods.

Our three readings today are all apocalyptic in the sense that they carry themes of Jesus coming again, and of end-times. There is a cosmic, eschatological dimension to these readings. And all of that is intended to give followers of Jesus great hope – and expectation.

The big problem, however, is that it didn't happen in the lives of that first generation of Christians, or any time in that first century when these words were written down – or anytime over the last two thousand years. Jesus hasn't come back yet. Will it ever happen? How then do we understand these prophetic words?

I believe the only way to interpret this 'delay' of the second coming is to focus on the 'here and now'. The present time - with the question, 'how is Jesus coming among us now and how can I be a part of it now?'

What if Jesus quietly walked into our lives right now? What would we find us doing? It's not a question that should evoke fear in us. God is never interested in trying to 'catch us out' doing the wrong thing. Far from it. He already knows we often get it wrong. It's more about finding us available – having just 'shown up' so to speak. Are we there at the sunrise?

I think the challenges we find in Jesus' words about 'keeping watch' (v42) and Paul's words about 'waking up' (v11) are really about living today *as if* Jesus might walk into the room right now. And that means being watchful, aware, waiting, prepared, walking in the light – all those words we read in our bibles about expecting the light of Christ to shine today, and being ready to be bearers of that light in the dark places of need and brokenness.

Over the years I've had many conversations with Christians about apocalyptic topics, including things like the 'rapture' of believers. Maybe, since I'm a minister, people have asked me "Do you think we are now in the end times?" My answer is 'well, yes, but only because the end has already begun in the birth, death and resurrection of Jesus and his promise to come again. So, in a sense it's *all* end times. But I don't like the question, because it seems to me that the very thing Jesus is telling his disciples *not* to do, is focus on the day or hour of his return, since that is a pointless exercise, and even warns them about people who will try to draw you into some definitive predictions about his return (Mt 24:24). Yet still, over the centuries there has been a weird fascination in Christian circles with timelines, dates and the order of events relating to Christ's return.

We simply need to see that the time we are in now is all we have – and to see that 'now' is an 'already but not yet' time. Things have already happened. Christ has come and has kept coming. But the task isn't finished. The world is still broken. Darkness and evil still abound. So there is very much a 'not yet'. And while there is a 'not yet' there is a job for us to do – *now*. There is much to do. And we need to just show up. It's about how we live *now*.

In our Isaiah reading, we are given this beautiful picture of a world made right by God. As it says, "they shall beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation" (v4). It's a vision of how it can be. A vision of justice, peace, unity, love. It's a vision that invites us to see the same vision through our own eyes, and to imagine the restoration of humanity actually happening. But at the same time, it's inviting us to see clearly the places where justice, peace, love and unity are *not* happening. To face the reality of that. And to be the hope and the light in those places.

Where is it in our wider world and in our smaller (individual and local) worlds where there is still injustice and inequality? Where is it that people are oppressed or hunger or thirst? Where is it that people die because of hatred and violence? Where is it that God's creation is not being respected and cared for? Where is it that Jesus needs to come to?

Our task I believe is to put ourselves in those places. Just show up where we can. Just to be there when the light shines. Be there when the sun rises.