

Friends

Every year when we get to December, we in the Church find ourselves living simultaneously in secular and religious worlds. Secular because Christmas is coming and we need to buy and wrap gifts, support schools, children and grand-children in Christmas activities, take part in Christmas Fairs and so on; and religious because Christmas has not yet come, and the great season of preparation that is Advent has only just begun.

Theologically, we talk about the “now and not yet” of Christ’s Kingdom. We know that we are living in the “Kingdom of God” which is justice and truth. We know that Jesus came to proclaim that the Kingdom had come. Yet, God’s Kingdom has not been perfected in our imperfect and sinful world. As with Christ’s birth, and Advent through which we now journey towards the annual celebration of Christmas, we live in the now and not yet. Christmas has come, and Christmas is coming. We live differently because we believe that when Jesus was born in Bethlehem, it was a world-changing event. Because of that, we want to take time to reflect on what it means that Jesus came. In addition, although the Christmas festival we wait and prepare for is a commemoration of a birthday long ago, at the same time, we are preparing for the coming of Jesus in the future, an event that we can’t really fully or even partially comprehend. In effect, we stand in the middle of a see-saw and try to maintain our balance.

Standing in both worlds, to maintain our equilibrium among sacred and profane, we model the life we must live throughout the year. A life that recognises that “Christ has died, Christ has risen, Christ will come again” and yet also seeks to be a part of God’s economy that will enact Christ’s affirmation that he has come “that they may have life in all its fullness.” To that end, we seek to spend time apart from the world in prayer and worship, and we also throw ourselves into the world to support refugees, the homeless, those in need through ill health, poverty and bad luck. We are creatures of contradictions: kind and loving, and fierce and determined. Sometimes those are good attributes and sometimes our kindness is weakness and our fierceness is hurtful. As we pass through the contradictions of Advent in our era, let’s spare a thought for the contradictions in ourselves. For as we balance these different approaches between being and doing; praying and acting; waiting and celebrating, we find something afresh of the “now and not yet” of the Kingdom of God.

God bless, Vicci