

Advent Hope and Expectation

York may already be full of all the trappings of Christmas but the Church is still keeping the season of Advent, a time of hope and expectation. And that sense of hope and expectation is surely felt by many throughout the world who are suffering hardship as a result of war, conflict, injustice, exploitation, oppression of poverty. Without that hope life becomes meaningless. It becomes merely day to day existence.

That message of hope the Church needs to proclaim loud and clear in our world today. That is the challenge and the opportunity for all Christians. The voice of that hope in God needs to be heard above all the competing messages of hatred, bigotry, ambition and bids for power.

We are blessed in Church leaders who are not afraid to do that. As a good example of this the Archbishop of Canterbury has asked for a more measured approach in Parliament to discussions on Brexit. He has called for a “ceasefire” on the use of insults, personalised attacks and pejorative terms. Whatever our views on this issue we can only welcome his wise words:

“If we are going to make a success of Brexit, and it's perfectly possible to do and in fact we should make a success of it, it gives opportunities as well as challenges, then we need a political leadership that is united in their attitude to the future, even if divided on policy. Therefore we do need reconciliation and unity.”

His last sentence is key: the need for reconciliation and unity. We see the same message in St Paul's words to the Christians in Rome which we heard in our Bible reading just now (Romans 15.4-7, 12-13). There Paul spells out the underlying importance of hope.

That hope is based on the revelation of God in the Bible, in the lives of holy people down the ages, and in the work of the Holy Spirit in our world today. This is no vain hope, no wishful thinking. It is based on our faith in God who is true to his promise, the very God of hope as Paul declares.

There often appear to be few certainties in life. We do not know what is going to happen from day to day. But God is the one constant. His justice, his holiness, his love are unchanging. And that was revealed in his incarnation to which we look forward with joyful expectation and anticipation at Christmas. God is not remote. Through the incarnation in his Son Jesus Christ he shares in our pain and our joys, our suffering and our well-being. For that we give thanks and praise.

15th December 2017
Kingsley Boulton