

Leavening Church

Thought for Sunday 6th December (Steve Langton)

We live in a world that is obsessed by time. Our lives are governed by the clocks and, in an age where every electrical device seems to display the exact time, there is no getting away from it. We want to know exactly when things are going to happen. Think of the news stories recently. When will lockdown end? When must pubs close? When will a vaccine be available? When will Donald Trump concede?

Christianity is not immune to this obsession either. Two events are particularly involved; creation and the second coming. James Ussher, the 17th Century Archbishop of Armagh and Primate of All Ireland famously arrived at a date of October 23, 4004 BC based on his understanding of the book of Genesis.

As for the second coming, numerous individuals and Christian sects have made confident predictions of when it will happen, totally undeterred by Jesus's pronouncements on the subject. I read a nice anecdote on this recently. Metropolitan Anthony, the Russian Orthodox Archbishop was visiting Scotland and was on his way to give a lecture at Dundee University. He was a tall man and cut a distinctive figure in his long black robes and hat. Seeing Anthony at a distance a lady crossed the road to meet him and then fell to her knees before him. Grasping the hem of his cassock, she asked if it was true that the world was to end the following Wednesday. He helped her up and then replied: "No, I don't think it is true; but it's best to be ready, just in case."

Today's reading from [2 Peter 3: 8-15](#) gives some perspective to these obsessions with time:

⁸ But do not forget this one thing, dear friends: with the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day. ⁹ The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. Instead he is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.

The eternal God who we serve is not constrained by time in the way we are. He doesn't struggle to find time to hear our prayers. Even when some human crisis, such as our current pandemic means that the heavenly switchboard is bombarded by prayers of distress, He will never have to put us on hold. We will never be told that 'You are number 237,897th in the queue, please hold the line', because he has time for all our needs. He is there for us at all times, even though the answers to our prayers may sometimes seem a long time coming to us and, of course, the answers may not be the ones we expect.

But there is an exception to the timeless nature of God, because today is the second Sunday of Advent, and so we celebrate how Jesus Christ came to earth in human form. For thirty years or so He was indeed constrained by time in much the same way as we are. For Jesus during his earthly life a day really was like a day, not like a thousand years, in exactly the same way as it is for us. That is the wonder of the incarnation; our God is not constrained by time or by any of the other limitations on us mere mortals, but He nevertheless knows first hand what it is like to live under those constraints.