

## **Advent Sunday 2024 – Year C - Luke 21:25-36, Jeremiah 33:14-16, Psalm 25, 1-9 & 1 Thess 3:9-end**

*Don't Look Up* is a satirical science fiction film that explores the absurdity of political and societal responses to existential crises. The story begins when two astronomers, Dr. Randall Mindy (Leonardo Di Caprio for fans among you) and his student Kate Dibiasky (Jennifer Lawrence), discover an enormous comet hurtling towards Earth. Their calculations reveal it will collide with the planet in six months, causing an extinction-level event.

They urgently present their findings to the President, but their warnings of destruction and mile high tsunamis are met with apathy, political manoeuvring, and self-serving agendas. As the media and public remain distracted by trivial scandals and gossip, the duo struggles to convey the gravity of the situation. The crisis becomes politicized, with the President's administration urging the public "Don't Look Up" and deny the comet's existence. Meanwhile the experts are vilified, dismissed, even co-opted by the media.

As the comet looms closer, efforts to stop it fail, and humanity's focus remains divided. I won't spoil the ending, though you might guess it...but the film serves as a biting critique of the world's failure to prioritise science, truth, and collective action in the face of global threats. Most in the film seem to be preparing for something, but they can't focus on what's important and the meaning of what's truly coming.

I couldn't help but see a thread here with the work and challenge of Advent which we enter today. Jesus' words from our gospel would have fitted comfortably in the script – *'There will be signs in the sun, the moon, and the stars, and on the earth distress among the nations confused by the roaring of the sea and the waves. People will faith from fear and foreboding of what is coming upon the world, for the powers of the heavens will be shaken...stand up and raise your heads.'*

Advent is a season of waiting, expectation and preparation; a now but not yet. We begin by thinking back. In these four weeks, we reflect upon the prophecies that foretold Jesus' first coming. We hear the stories of the patriarchs of the Christian faith. We pay attention to the lives of John the Baptist and the Virgin Mary. We prepare our hearts to celebrate Christmas. But Advent is also about looking ahead to the end of time when, we are told, all things will be made new. This is different from all the other seasons of the church in that it looks beyond history altogether, and awaits Jesus Christ's coming again. Advent is about Jesus' first coming but it is also about his second.

The words of the prophet Jeremiah endure – *'the days are surely coming, says the Lord'*. As we say each Sunday, *'Christ has died, Christ is risen, Christ will come again', 'He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead'*. The ancient prayer of Advent is *maranatha* meaning *'Come, Lord Jesus'*. In Advent we are offered opportunity to contemplate 'the end', by which I do not mean an inevitable apocalyptic disaster but 'end' in the sense of purpose and fulfilment. Traditionally they are the ultimate realities and themes that go by the name of the *Four Last Things*; death, judgement, heaven and hell – the season of the last things. At this beginning of the Christian year, we start at the end because if we can reckon with what finally matters, we can live future directed lives. It will affect how we live now. *'In my end is my beginning'* wrote T.S. Eliot.

Luke and Jeremiah's words in our readings are both about seeing the signs in times of turmoil. They ask of us how are we living now? What are we prioritising? Is it gratitude? Is it service? *'Be on your guard so that your hearts are not weighed down with the worries of this life'*. How are we preparing our hearts to receive from God afresh the joy of Christmas? The temptation all around is to fast forward. To ignore what really matters and fill any time spent reflecting on that with an ever longer but, in the end, vacuous Christmas if it's just about powering on at the same pace, a frenzy of superficial holiday merriment.

*'While there is scant hope of changing the culture around us, the Church need not be a fellow traveller. The call is for the Church to reclaim for the sake of its own life and mission Advent's focus on the reign of God and, in so doing, to hone the counter-cultural edge of the Gospel at the very beginning of the liturgical year' (The Advent Project). Christmas will be a greater Feast still if instead, we work on our alertness to Jesus' presence and take some space and time to ask, 'what would it be if Jesus really came as if for the first time into my life? What would it be for the good news really to change me and my ways?'*

Advent says to us that, in the end, what matters is a world that is loved by God, what matters is that, in ways we cannot comprehend, it will find its fulfilment in Christ and God's kingdom will come on earth as it is in heaven. *'Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away'* says Jesus. In that 'end' is our beginning. If we grapple with that, we can face all that is frightening and fragile about our personal lives and our global concerns, together trusting in the one who declares *'I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end'*. Amen.