

Advent Voices

Session 4: The voice of Pilate: the voice of avoidance

Welcome to our 4th and final session thinking about some of the voices that call to us in Advent.

Previously we've thought about God's voice that brings light, the challenging voice of John the Baptist and the gentle voice of Mary.

And I hope that these voices have encouraged us to respond to God with our own voices – of praise and thanks, perhaps with our questions or requests.

The season of Advent calls us to look back to the first coming of God into our world – but it also asks us to look forward.

Hear the Collect – the prayer said for centuries on Advent Sunday, in its original 1662 Book of Common Prayer form:

ALMIGHTY God, give us grace that we may cast away the works of darkness, and put upon us the armour of light, now in the time of this mortal life, in which thy Son Jesus Christ came to visit us in great humility; that in the last day, when he shall come again in his glorious Majesty, to judge both the quick and the dead, we may rise to the life immortal; through him who liveth and reigneth with thee and the Holy Ghost, now and ever. Amen.

Advent is a time of preparation for all people who live between the first and second comings of God.

We prepare to celebrate God's first coming visibly and tangibly into our human world, And as we remember that he came to be the Saviour of the human race, we also call to mind that God has promised to come again – in glory, to judge the living and the dead and establish a new heaven and a new earth.

So in Advent we also prepare for that second coming, that will bring judgement as well as salvation...

Let's pause here and think:

We may well die before God comes again in glory. But it makes little difference to what will happen to us! Because God has promised to come again to judge the living and the dead.

The 1st question is: Do we believe this?

And depending on our answer, a 2nd : So how are we preparing now for this future event?

Let's take a few moments to have an honest conversation with God

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Now, with the 2nd Advent in mind, let's hear the voice of Pilate this session.

This is the voice that reminds us that the arrival of the baby Jesus was not an end in

itself. The angels, the shepherds and the wise men lead us on to the events of Easter and beyond - and the promise of God's second arrival.

Pontius Pilate was governor of the small but troublesome province of Judea, part of the Roman Empire, a famously difficult posting because the tensions and skirmishes between the Roman administration and the Jewish population often escalated into violence. Based in Jerusalem, Pilate ruled this area between 27 and 36 AD and so presided over Jesus' trial and set in motion his crucifixion ... and in doing this secured his own place in history.

All 4 gospels have an account of Pilate's encounter with Jesus.

Read Mark's account (15: 1-15) and as you read, note how many questions he asks.

15 As soon as it was morning, the chief priests held a consultation with the elders and scribes and the whole council. They bound Jesus, led him away, and handed him over to Pilate. ² Pilate asked him, "Are you the King of the Jews?" He answered him, "You say so." ³ Then the chief priests accused him of many things. ⁴ Pilate asked him again, "Have you no answer? See how many charges they bring against you." ⁵ But Jesus made no further reply, so that Pilate was amazed.

⁶ Now at the festival he used to release a prisoner for them, anyone for whom they asked. ⁷ Now a man called Barabbas was in prison with the rebels who had committed murder during the insurrection. ⁸ So the crowd came and began to ask Pilate to do for them according to his custom. ⁹ Then he answered them, "Do you want me to release for you the King of the Jews?" ¹⁰ For he realized that it was out of jealousy that the chief priests had handed him over. ¹¹ But the chief priests stirred up the crowd to have him release Barabbas for them instead. ¹² Pilate spoke to them again, "Then what do you wish me to do with the man you call the King of the Jews?" ¹³ They shouted back, "Crucify him!" ¹⁴ Pilate asked them, "Why, what evil has he done?" But they shouted all the more, "Crucify him!" ¹⁵ So Pilate, wishing to satisfy the crowd, released Barabbas for them; and after flogging Jesus, he handed him over to be crucified.

Pilate is a man in authority, with considerable power. He's no fool. He knows the charges against Jesus have been brought by jealous men, the Scribes, the Pharisees, the teachers of the Jewish Law who were determined to wipe Jesus out and he finds no evidence to convict Jesus. In fact he's described by all the gospel writers as wanting – even *very much* wanting – to have Jesus released.

BUT ...

He is also frightened that releasing Jesus would result in riots and bloodshed. The crowds in Jerusalem who were baying for Jesus to be crucified would quickly turn against the Roman occupying forces if he did not give into their demands. His own safety and authority could be threatened...

So he tries to side-step the problem by bombarding with questions the Jews who brought Jesus to him, culminating in the final fatal question –
What do you wish me to do with this man you call the King of the Jews?

Mark – and all our gospels – paint a picture of Pilate as a weak man in a powerful position, caught in a dilemma.

He knows what he should do but he is controlled by fear of what might happen if he does this. So he tried to pass the decision over to the crowd. ‘What do you want me to do with this man...?’

Having very little indeed in common with Pilate, nevertheless, there are 2 key questions here for us as we think about and prepare for our meeting face to face with God:

Are we avoiding making the decisions we should make?
And whose - or what - power controls us?

Take a few moments to ask yourself those questions...

Pilate is a great one for questions! He puts some to Jesus a little earlier, as recorded by Luke and John

Don't you hear the accusations against you?
Have you no answer?
Are you a Galilean?
Are you a king?
Are you the King of the Jews?
And, of course, his famous question ‘What is truth?’

Pilate fires many questions at Jesus, but essentially all ask the same thing: Who are you? And so Pilate voices the question for which people have sought the answer ever since: Who are you Jesus?

This is a real question – probably the question – for all people who *have* lived, *currently* live and *will* live between the first and second comings of God.

It is a real question for us – because scripture tells us God is coming back, visibly into our world. And even if our mortal life ends before this event, we will at some point meet God face to face. And God's face will be one of love – and of judgement.

So **let's sit with Pilate's questions and ask them for ourselves.**

Who is Jesus to you at this time in your life?

Are you content with what you already know and believe about God? Or do you want to discover more?

How would you describe your relationship with Jesus this Advent?

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And in a moment of silence, ask yourself the ultimate Advent question: **Are you ready to meet God, face to face?**

Advent is a complex season, a mixture of joyful anticipation and preparations for celebration and the realisation that as God came once into the human world, God has promised to come again. Advent tells us that God is a God of love – and justice.

One piece of music that journeys through this complexity is Handel's God-inspired oratorio 'Messiah'.

So, in preparation for our future singing in eternity, try to find an online recording of the Hallelujah Chorus and perhaps sing along.

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