

LINDFORD METHODIST CHURCH
SUNDAY 29 NOVEMBER 2015
ADVENT SUNDAY
NOTHING CAN SEPARATE US 4 - JOSEPH

Readings: Genesis 39:1-23; Luke 21:25-36.

I presume we're all familiar with the concept of someone coming to stay – it may not have happened recently but we know what's involved.

So what do you have to do to be ready for that?

Answers

e.g. cleaning

cooking

know what they're coming for / what we're going to do

Advent is about being ready

For celebrating Christmas

Various things we have to do to prepare for that

e.g. ... *answers*

for Jesus' return

we know when Christmas will be – 25 December this year

But he hasn't told us when he's coming again

To be ready for something when we don't know when it will happen means being ready all the time.

There are some similarities with being ready for a visitor or being ready for guests:

cleaning – cleaning up our lives:

getting rid of the dust and dirt

- of grumbling and complaining
- of lying, hate and cheating
- of bad attitudes to people, or a spirit of entitlement rather than a spirit of generosity and welcome

That's why when we worship part of our service is penitence, when we pray the model includes saying sorry to God for the ways in which we go wrong. It's all those things that keep us from God.

But we know God forgives and so when Jesus taught his disciples to pray he included not just the request that we be forgiven for our sins but that we should be forgiving people as well.

Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us

The forgiveness we get when we ask for it will be the same kind that we give out to others.

In Advent we consciously remember that Jesus may return any time – he said, “no one knows the day or the hour”.

If we're going to be ready we need to be faithful all the time, we need to be working hard at living the kind of life he wants.

Some of the time that's not too difficult. When all in the garden is rosy, life is going well, we don't encounter difficult people, we don't encounter temptations that would lead us astray, the weather's nice so we can walk to church or the car and not get wet – that's OK, we can live pretty much how he wants us to live.

But sometimes there are challenges. This series that we're calling “Nothing can separate us” – nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ,

from Romans 8 is about keeping hold of that assurance even when things happen along the way that might make the Advent life of readiness more difficult.

So remember the good news is that whatever happens, however much life seems to be stacked against us nothing can separate us from the love of God.

On Advent Sunday we sometimes look at the Patriarchs: Abraham, Isaac, Jacob – the first to encounter God, the first generations to follow the ways God led them, the first to know what it was to hear God speak and act in obedience, the first to be found faithful (after Noah and Enoch); also the first to be faithful in spite of difficulties and events that might have made them wonder whether following God's ways was really worth it.

For a change I thought we'd look at Joseph this time.

The 1970s musical has helped make Joseph's story quite familiar to a certain generation.

Lots of stuff went wrong for Joseph:

His brothers ganged up on him and had sold him into slavery – that's what we call people trafficking today

When he got to Egypt and found himself in a good position in a prestigious house his employer's wife tried to take advantage of him and get him dismissed – that's sexual harassment today - and he ended up unjustly imprisoned

There's be courts of appeal and need for forensic evidence today but not in Joseph's case – they hadn't invented DNA testing ...

But even when unjustly imprisoned the love of God followed him and he rose to an important position among the prisoners – he had what would be called extensive privileges
Eventually that led to his being freed and pardoned because he was useful to Pharaoh – he became a kid of visions and dreams consultant
He rose to become Prime Minister – the one with all the power under Pharaoh.

How do we join all that up for us today?

Remember, the good news is that nothing can separate us from the love of God.

Even if we encounter people who turn against us, or manipulate a situation to make us look bad, nothing can separate us from God's love

The other important aspect is that we look at this together – church is a corporate thing. Christianity is not a solitary, private thing. It is personal but it is personal within something corporate. So we have something of a responsibility for one another.

This is not a responsibility that means we need to know the innermost details of one another's souls. It is a responsibility to ensure that we maintain the best, most helpful environment in which we can all be ready for Jesus' return, that we know and hear about what Jesus did and said and taught and that we have the encouragement of one another to live in a way that Jesus wants.

We can remember that as we live faithfully it is true of us as it was true of Joseph: the LORD was with Joseph

When Jacob died in Egypt having been reunited with Joseph and all the family was there Joseph told his brothers what could have been a commentary on Romans 8:35-39 -

Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword?

No

I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, ³⁹neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord

When his brothers were worried that once Jacob was dead Joseph would get revenge on them Joseph said:

'Don't be afraid. Am I in the place of God? ²⁰You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives.

Joseph understood that in all that happened, even being sold into slavery, even the episode with Potiphar's wife, even his unjust imprisonment – nothing could separate him from the love of God. Because he always acted faithfully, always sought to walk in God's ways wherever he was and however he got there.

The details will be different for us – but the challenges may similarly tough as we encounter them.

The challenge is to remain faithful, holding on to the assurance that nothing can separate us from the love of God.

That way of life, that faithfulness is helped by being in the company of others. That way we can learn from the Bible and help one another to go

on learning and growing and developing as we love and serve each other,
as we love and serve our families and friends and
As we love and serve those around us and further afield who are in need.

Being ready is about being faithful whatever comes our way – then we will
find as Joseph found that nothing can separate us from the love of God
that we find in Jesus.

Amen.