

# Homily for People and Parishes

Bishop Cam Venables – Sunday 1<sup>st</sup> December 2024, Advent 1

Readings: Jeremiah 33:14-16

**Psalm 25:1-10**

**1Thessalonians 3:9-13**

**Luke 21:25-38**

I think any lyrics written by the English song writer Brian Wren are worth reflecting upon, and the hymn book 'Together in Song' has a good number of hymns composed by him. In TiS Hymn 653 Wren affirms that, *'This is a day of new beginnings, time to remember, and move on, time to believe what love is bringing, laying to rest the pain that's gone...'* I think it's a great hymn to sing in this season of Advent.

However, we might also acknowledge that each day is a new beginning! As the sun comes up, and the night comes to an end, there is an invitation for us to engage in what we believe to be the God given gift of a day.

So, how is the gift of today going for you? Where have you been over the last week? Who are you planning to catch up with in just a few weeks over Christmas? and, what are you planning to do next year?

Most of us at some stage, have made New Year resolutions, with the hope that if we follow them our lives will become healthier and more fulfilling. We might resolve to walk for at least half an hour each day or read at least one book each week. We might set up a space for prayer at home with the intention of praying there regularly. We might take on some new voluntary work that cares for people, or one that gives us the opportunity to plant trees. We might resolve to learn a new language or begin playing a musical instrument... there are always plenty of options!

I wonder what resolutions you and I will make as this year ends and what will shape and inform them?

In many of the school speeches I have heard over recent weeks, the speakers have sought to inform and inspire in their listeners and some of them have been remarkable. One left me feeling a little inadequate because I cannot ever imagine myself running five ultra-marathons in some of the toughest wilderness areas of the world... But, others left me thinking I like that! In fact I could do that, and I would be a better friend, or a more effective leader, if I did that!

If you had an opportunity to share something inspiring or wise with people who were young, or not so young, what would you offer? If you have some clarity about that – it may be worth considering how that currently helps to shape your our own living.

I wonder if part of the gift of Advent – the short season before Christmas that begins today - is the opportunity to reflect upon the previous twelve months, glean some wisdom, and seek guidance from God about what we could helpfully give focus next year?

The Psalm set for today, Psalm 25, is a prayer that has the clear request to be guided and recalibrated by God's Spirit. It affirms, *'To YOU, O Lord, I lift up my soul. O my God, in YOU I trust... Make me to know YOUR ways, O Lord; teach me YOUR paths... Lead me in YOUR truth, and teach me...'* There is the important recognition in this that we can get off track... and our sense of being in harmony with God, with others, and with ourselves... can drift to discord. There is a clear intention in the Psalm and adopting that intention could be a gift for us.

In the midst of our Christmas preparations – the cards being written, the gifts being bought, and the menus being planned could we helpfully make time to think and pray about the things that will shape much of our living next year? The Gospel reading today invites us to be alert and ready and not just drift through the year.

I'll offer where my thinking is in response to this challenge to live more intentionally next year, partly as a primer for your thinking but also as an invitation for you to hold me accountable. Next year I plan to be more 'curious, creative, and kind...' and when we meet or touch base next year, I would welcome you asking how I'm going with these!

I don't think it is just because I'm an Anglican that I think in threes – but groups of three certainly seem easier to remember!

The curiosity element in some ways is not hard because we live in a world that can cause us to wonder many times each day: How does that work? Where does that come from? Who thought of that? Why did that happen?

However, to give 'curiosity' focus in 2025 I will seek to better understand, through further study, the relationship between identity & resilience using the question posed in Psalm 137 as a starting point.

The creativity focus is probably not hard either because I think we are each creative and it's good to maintain and develop existing ability. However, I also think there are times when there is potential to explore new ways of being creative and I'd particularly like to explore this by using music in the care of people who have dementia.

It may seem strange for kindness to be an explicit intention because it is something we all aspire to, but it is a way of being in the world, deeply grounded in the commandment to 'love one another'. To develop this intentionally, I think there'll be discipline needed at the

end of each day, to consider the conversations, emails, messages, texts, and activity... to identify kindness, or the lack of it? Perhaps also wisdom, or the lack of it?

So, these are the three elements where I plan to give focus next year – what about you? If you had to name an area of focus next year, what would it be? And, if it's more than one area of focus, what would they be? If you're happy to share – I'd love to hear what they are so I can pray for you and, if you're comfortable, for me to check in to see how you're going!

For now, would you please join me as I close in prayer:

Gracious God, we give thanks for the gift of our lives, and your love. We offer you our preparations for Christmas and the coming year and pray for your guidance. Through your Spirit help us to discern the resolutions and areas of focus that will enable us to grow in faith and make a difference for good. We pray in the name of One who shows us the way, Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.