



Advent 2024

'Be ready for action, with your robes hitched up and your lamps alight. Be like people who wait for their master's return from a wedding party, ready to let him in the moment he arrives and knocks.' Luke 12:35-36

Dear friends,

There are some books that become regular companions. One book which I have travelled with on a number of occasions through Advent and Christmas is a collection of readings entitled, *Watch for the Light*. It is frequently challenging, nearly always illuminating and often surprisingly apposite to the situation in which I find myself or into which I pray. It is now the fourth time I have journeyed with this book during Advent.

The first extract in the book is written by Christoph Blumhardt, taken from a book entitled *Action in Waiting*. The Blumhardts (Christoph and his father Johann Christoph) are little read in English speaking circles yet they had a significant impact upon the development of late 19th and early twentieth century theology including that of the early Karl Barth. They had roots in pietism but were also pioneers in the development of social democracy in Germany. Christoph's writing is profoundly influenced by the idea of God's advent; literally the idea that God comes to us. It is only this fact, he argues, that gives value to any of our practices whether that is reading scripture, being attentive to the means of grace or seeking and acting for justice. In more straightforward language, these activities only make sense if we believe that God turns up. God comes to us in Christ in the incarnation and at the end of time but importantly God's advent in Christ is also now, in the present, and this demands a response from us.

In a profound reflection on Luke 12:35-36, Blumhardt argues that God's kingdom is not formed by our discovery or by our intentions but by the coming of Christ which shapes the whole of creation. Yet despite this, much depends on our activity. We are to be like those dressed for action, lighting our lamps, preparing everything and everyone in the house for his arrival. What value, you might ask, does this have for our world now? In many ways the world seems particularly dark at the moment with political uncertainty, conflict and the accelerating impact of climate change. Yet for Blumhardt these uncertainties make it even more important that we are ready for action. He speaks of universal wrongness as being like a 'choking, suffocating blanket' over the world. In such circumstances,

‘As long as God’s kingdom has to be fought for, it is more important to be dressed for work – ready for action – to make an effort to do something in keeping with God’s plan, often against the whole weight of the world.’

We might picture this activity of preparation as being hinted at in the way in which we prepare a household for Christmas and the return or visit of friends and family. More deeply though, preparing the household for the master’s return functions as a figurative way of talking about a world being made right, being made ready and prepared to receive its future. These do indeed seem strange, difficult and confusing times. Perhaps this makes our search for the heart of Advent doubly important this year for as Blumhardt reminds us,

‘We have to learn to live in what is coming from God every day and to carry a light from this awareness into the darkness.’

Yours in Christ,

Richard

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