

Advent 1

27<sup>th</sup> Nov 16

Place: St Mary's Wimbledon

Isa 2.1-5, Rom 13

Theme: Wake Up

Matt 24.36-44

- ◆ Wake up! If you are awake, keep awake.
- ◆ But what is it that we need to wake up to? Surely if you have managed to get to church this morning you have woken up?
- ◆ We need to wake up to reality, but the trouble is, how do we know what reality is?
- ◆ Chuang Chou, outlined the problem very clearly. He was one of the greatest philosophers of the Taoist tradition. He said that he dreamed that he was a butterfly, flying about enjoying itself. It did not know that it was Chuang Chou. Suddenly he awoke, and veritably he was Chuang Chou again. He did not know whether he was Chuang Chou dreaming that he was a butterfly, or whether it was the butterfly dreaming that it was Chuang Chou.
- ◆ Rowan Williams said that the greatest spiritual battle of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century is not between good and evil, but between illusion and reality.
- ◆ How do you normally wake up? Do you wake up just before the alarm goes off or when the sun rises, or is it a rude awakening? When did someone last wake you up? It can be quite unpleasant being awoken if you are deeply asleep; and a little disorientating.
- ◆ Many religious traditions talk about how most people most of the time sleep walk through life, unaware of anything except their own dreams and desires. Sadly they only wake up when reality gives them a rude awakening and things change when they don't want them to, or they experience limitations that they had not anticipated, when they find them not in control of life. When we sleep and dream, we are at the centre of our dreams, they belong to us. Waking up means realising that we are not

the centre of the world and that life is not all about us. Waking up to this can be as painful as being shaken awake when we are in a deep sleep. We may resist it, we may resent it or get angry about it. We want to stay asleep and enjoy our dreams, but we discover that we are not in control.

- ◆ One of the catch phrases of our age is that people are 'living the dream'. I guess that Donald Trump is probably feeling like that at the moment; others fear that we are living in a nightmare.
- ◆ When we start waking up we can often be mistaken about what is going on and where we are. The discomfort of waking up, the shock can be deeply disorientating.
- ◆ The same is true when something changes in our world which we do not like. When we lose someone, or become ill, when we face things changing for the worse in our circumstances. As we wake up we realise that we are not in control of many of the things that are most important to us; our health and the health of those we love, our relationships, our circumstances, our neighbours and community.
- ◆ Discovering that we are powerless over something that matters very much to us and we cannot change is very painful. It can easily lead us to despair. If we cannot prevent things changing, if we cannot avoid loss – ultimately if we cannot avoid death – then what hope is there?
- ◆ If we feel we have reached this point in waking up, it is not the final state of awareness. We are only half awake.
- ◆ Once we recognise our own powerlessness and vulnerability we are awakening. Once we recognise that we are not the centre of the universe and that life is bigger than we are we are getting closer to reality, but waking up and keeping awake is more than that. Waking up to reality is waking up to God. God is the most real thing that there

is. Waking up is recognising that God is there, God is with us and God will save us. Looking to other people to save us will only disappoint. Donald Trump will disappoint the dreams and longings of the people of America just as President Obama has. Even the greatest leader cannot save, they are only human. The only person who can save us, the only person who can fulfil our immortal longing and give us peace is God. He knows that we cannot save ourselves, so he comes to us in his Son Jesus Christ to save us. He comes promising to change us and our world from a world of war to a world of peace. He comes to save us from death and to lead us into new life. He is coming soon, when we least expect it. Our job as the church is to stay awake, to seek God and his Kingdom. We need to wake up to reality so that we will know him when he comes. When we are fully awake we will know that facing the reality of the world does not lead us to despair, but hope. Once we are awake we begin to see God moving, acting, saving the world and we realise that we can trust ourselves and everyone we love to God and we can accept that we cannot save ourselves.