Advent 3 2025

Have you organised next year's diary yet? If you have, well done, if you haven't, don't worry, you're definitely not alone. Apparently, many people still favour the tangible effort of physically writing an appointment down, rather than typing it in. It says something about us, I think. We spend a great deal of our lives thinking about time: who we will spend it with, how we will fill it, where it will take us next. We plan, we schedule, we diarise. And don't get me wrong, planning matters. We all know how frustrating it can be to be around someone who is completely disorganised and doesn't know where they are going or what they are supposed to be doing.

But there is a danger too. If we are not careful, we can spend so much time thinking about *another* time — tomorrow, next week, next year, that we lose sight of what is happening right here and now.

John Lennon captured this beautifully in his song *Beautiful Boy* when he sang those now-famous words: *"Life is what happens while you're busy making other plans."* It sums up a paradox many of us live with. We long to enjoy the present moment, yet we can't help constantly looking ahead, making plans so we feel secure, in control, or prepared. Or sometimes we do the opposite: we dwell on the past, replaying old conversations, old mistakes, old hurts.

How many hours do we spend, as individuals and as a society, raking over what has already happened? Turning it over again and again in our minds, even though it cannot be changed. The truth is that none of us are ever truly in control of our lives. Things happen that we do not expect, illness, loss, joy, interruption, and when they do, they can throw our carefully laid plans completely off course. And sometimes it is only when the direction of our lives changes dramatically that we look back and realise how many important moments we have missed. Moments that are gone and can never be retrieved.

If only we had been more present. If only we had noticed what God was doing in front of us. Jesus, again and again, calls people back to the present moment. In modern language we might describe this as mindfulness, but for Jesus it was simply about trusting the Father and living fully in God's love *now*. The gospels are full of his words that gently loosen our grip on anxiety about past and future. In Matthew's Gospel, Jesus says, "Do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will wear," and later, "Do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself." In John's Gospel he says, "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid," and "I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly."

And this is where Christmas speaks so powerfully into all of this.

At Christmas, God does not wait for the perfect moment. God does not arrive when the world is calm, organised, or ready. God comes *into* the mess, the noise, the uncertainty ,

into a specific place, at a specific time, to ordinary people going about their ordinary lives. A baby born to a young couple who had other plans. Shepherds interrupted in their fields. Wise men forced to change their route home.

Christmas is God saying: *this moment matters*. Not someday. Not when everything is sorted. Now.

The eternal God steps into time. The Word becomes flesh. Emmanuel, God with us, not in theory, but in the here and now. We were never meant to live anywhere other than the present moment. Why? Because it is only in the present that we can truly know God. God is eternal; we are not. We meet God not in yesterday or tomorrow, but now, in this breath, this place, this opportunity to love, to notice, to respond.

So don't waste the precious time God gives you worrying endlessly about the future or replaying the past. What's done is done, and what is still to come will come soon enough. Instead, receive each moment as a gift from God. Live as if Christ were standing right beside you, because at Christmas we proclaim that he is.

Your life is a precious gift from God. This moment is a gift from God. This Christmas is a gift from God.

So make the most of every opportunity, as we approach Christmas, and onwards.

Amen.