

Jeremiah 33:14-16; 1 Thessalonians 3:9-13; Luke 21:25-36

You can't have your cake and eat it too. But it's the beginning of Advent today, so perhaps you can? Stay tuned to find out more...

This week was the finale of this year's season of the Great British Baking Show, which is my very favourite tv show. It's cosy and delightful and full of wondrous food, some of which I've made myself, and some I know I'll never summon the ambition to attempt! Each episode has three challenges, but the curve-ball is always the second challenge, where the bakers are given basic ingredients and a very basic recipe for some elaborate and difficult dessert, and they are required to rely on their experience and baking know-how to create the correct end result. Of course, not everybody always manages to get to that correct end result! But one of the joys of baking is that anyone can have a go. No matter how fancy the French patisserie looks at the end, it all starts with the same basic building blocks - flour, eggs, sugar, butter. Simple ingredients can result in the most spectacular dessert.

Now today is the first day of Advent - the new church year! We each have the basic Advent recipe - 4 weeks of waiting, preparation for Christmas, looking forward to celebrating the birth of Jesus. Our liturgical colour for Advent is blue, the colour of anticipation. And hopefully we all have some of the basic ingredients - faith, hope, prayer, love. But what we do with those is up to each of us.

Traditionally, Advent is a time for reflection and preparation of the soul. We're encouraged to devote some extra time to our spiritual lives. But it can be pretty hard to find space when it's a time of year full of extra activities. So it's a chance to get creative with your ingredients.

Our gospel reading today is fairly sombre, with Jesus talking about how the world will have to go through all sorts of hardships, but there's a throwaway line in there that is kind of astonishing. In between his apocalyptic description of fear and foreboding, Jesus gives a command, 'Be on guard so that your hearts are not weighed down with... the worries of this life'. Watch out that you aren't weighed down with worry. That seems like a pretty big ask when you've just described nations being confused and people fainting all over the place. Do not worry! And yet this is a command that Jesus gives enough times that we know he really really means it.

So how, especially in December when we are running between one thing and another and trying to fit in christmas shopping and music and eating and activities and decorating and travel and family and friends, HOW are we supposed to cultivate a do-not-worry heart? If that's our spectacular end-goal, what can we do to get there?

This is where the anticipation of Advent comes in. The gift of now-and-not-yet.

When I was young, I knew where my mum hid the Christmas presents before they'd been wrapped up. And I confess, I used to sneak peaks at what I might be getting. There was one year when I was about 13 when I discovered several particularly exciting presents, leading to a couple of months of very pleased secret anticipation. Now, I'm not advocating being sneaky (I also regretted depriving myself of the surprise on christmas morning, so I think that was the last year I rummaged through the cupboards), but there is something delightful about looking forward to a good thing.

There's something thrilling about anticipation, a little ember of joy glowing beneath the surface. It's that kind of looking forward, a knowing that something wonderful is coming, that fills us with joy. Advent invites us into that same kind of anticipation. Christ has already come into the world, yet every year we wait for him again. This dual reality—*now* and *not yet*—is a key ingredient for not worrying. Anticipation draws our gaze away from the anxieties of the present, and turns it towards the hope of God's promises. It's not a dismissal of hardship or imperfection but an invitation to trust in the greater story God is weaving.

Paul highlights this beautifully in his letter to the Thessalonians. It's a new church and they have their fair share of issues, but despite this Paul is glowing with thanksgiving for them. He looks forward to their faith deepening, yet despite the considerable imperfection with the way things are,

Paul knows that God is at work in their lives, and this is a cause for joy. Joy even in uncertainty because there is trust that God is at work. Thus we have the now-and-not-yet, the anticipation of what is to come, while also finding thanksgiving, rather than worry, in the present. That's some impressive baking.

So, it's Advent. There's a lot going on, and goodness knows there's plenty to worry about. Yet Jesus calls us to something radical: *Do not let your hearts be weighed down with worry*. Instead, we are invited to get creative with our ingredients of love, joy, hope, and anticipation - the joyful expectation that God is making all things new, again and again. And maybe Advent reminds us that sometimes we *can* have our cake and eat it too. For in Christ we find a joy that is both here and still to come—a joy that transforms us, sustains us, and points us to the ultimate fulfillment of God's love.

Look around. In this gathering of beloved children of God, we have a sneak peek of what is to come, even as we anticipate something far greater. This is the hope of Advent: Christ has come, Christ will come again, and Christ is with us even now. So be inspired with your Advent baking this week. Embrace hope, faith, love, and prayer. And may the joy of God's presence sustain us, as we wait for all things to be made new.

Amen.