

Advent Sunday 2018
St George's Chapel, Windsor Castle

Then they will see "the Son of Man coming in a cloud" with power and great glory.
The words come from our second lesson this morning.

Today is Advent Sunday, the start of the season in the Christian calendar, when we seek to re-awaken our waiting for, and expectation of, that time when all that has been promised in the life and death and resurrection and ascension of Jesus Christ will be fulfilled in what we can only express imaginatively as:

"the Son of Man coming in a cloud" with power and great glory. You might of course call it: "The Triumph of God's Love".

Let those words form the backdrop to what I have to say today.

Andrew Young was a twentieth century poet of whom some of you will have heard. He was born in Scotland in 1885, educated in Edinburgh and, having discarded his plans to become a barrister, was ordained as a Presbyterian minister in 1912. By then, his first slim volume of poems had already been published. He married in 1914 and served, during the First World War, as Superintendent of an Army Rest Camp in France. Some years later, in 1920, Andrew Young moved south to become, if I remember correctly, a Free-Church minister in Hove, in Sussex. And then, in 1939, he was ordained as a Church of England priest, and served as vicar of the small country parish of Stonegate in Sussex until his retirement in 1959. He stayed in the diocese of Chichester, and died in 1971.

I am not sure that, at first glance, you would see Andrew Young as a 'religious' poet. However, in and through his poetry, much of which reveals his keen eye for and his love of nature, you cannot help but detect something 'spiritual'; maybe something almost 'mystical'. And, as you recall the fact that he was a Christian, and moreover a Christian minister, you are sure to detect, in his poetry, something more than immediately meets the eye and ear.

Take for example a poem first published in 1922 when he was just about thirty seven years old, and had only recently arrived in Hove. The poem is called **Waiting**. It is simple and, I think, rather lovely.

We waited for the spring,
My love and I;
The larks were in the sky,
The lambs were on the hill;
Did we not hear them sing?
Did we not hear them cry?
Yes, yes, O yes, but still
We waited for the spring
My love and I.

We waited for the spring,
My love and I;
Speedwell that robs the sky,
Trumpeting daffodil

And blackthorn's blossoming,
We watched them all go by;
These came and went but still
We waited for the spring
 My wife and I.

It is an evocative poem about a journey that young lovers take into married life together. Yet there is something rather wistful, not to say 'sad', about it. Though the couple go on 'waiting for the spring', its arrival never seems to be fully satisfying. The larks may sing, the lambs may bleat, speedwell can take its blueness from the sky while daffodils trumpet and blackthorn blossoms, but still: "We waited for the spring / My love and I." And, as time moved on, still: "We waited for the spring / My wife and I."

I find it impossible to believe that Andrew Young's Christian faith did not inform this poem. And, since the title **Waiting** is bound to evoke some sense of 'Advent' in any intelligent Christian mind, I judge that it must be a poem suited to a day such as today.

We waited for the spring,
 My love and I.

We waited for the spring,
 My wife and I.

It is as if, in spite of all the many springtime blessings of this life, we are never satisfied, and go on waiting, expecting, hoping for: 'the real thing'. A kind of yearning; a profound desire, seems to be an ingredient in our human make-up. You might say that to be 'human' is to wait, to want, to expect and to desire.

We waited for the spring,
 My love and I.

We waited for the spring,
 My wife and I.

And what is the "spring" for which we wait, and of which all other 'springs' are but foreshadowings, anticipations, adumbrations? The spring for which we wait is that time, that season when, as the poet Elizabeth Jennings once wrote, we shall see: "creation / Planned and purposed and somehow achieved by love".

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It is that for which we wait. But, in spite of many springtime blessings, nowadays it can seem that we wait in dark times. Famine and indiscriminate slaughter are to be found in, amongst too many places, Yemen and Syria. Self-interest, untruthfulness and cynicism have certainly infected both political policy and private aspiration everywhere. Even those of us who smile and put a brave face on things know, in the chilly depths of our hearts, that we live in decayed and decadent times.

We waited for the spring,

My love and I.

We waited for the spring,
My wife and I.

And how are we Christians to wait in this Advent season?

We are to wait 'remembering'; to wait calling to mind that, through the cross and resurrection, God has promised us that even the very worst shall be transmuted into the very best, and that despair can never be an option for those who claim to follow Jesus Christ.

We are to wait 'in prayer', never allowing the words "Thy Kingdom come", the words that Jesus gave us, to abandon our hearts, or to cease to inspire our actions.

And we are to wait in 'trust', having confidence in that seemingly natural, God-given and Christ inspired, human impulse to 'believe' in a better world to come.

It was the Arab-Christian mystic Kahlil Gibran who wrote:

"like seeds dreaming beneath the snow your heart dreams of spring.
Trust the dreams, for in them is hidden the gate to eternity."

Then they will see "the Son of Man coming in a cloud" with power and great glory.
You might of course call it: "The Triumph of God's Love".

During Advent, it is this for which we wait, and wait expectantly.

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Did we not hear them cry?
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The Right Reverend David Conner, KCVO