Hebrews 10: 11-14, 19-25; Mark 13: 1-8

**May I speak in the name of God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen**

The season of the Christmas advert is upon us. It is slightly weird that this is even a thing, but over the last few years, it has certainly become a thing. We know now to look out for the John Lewis Christmas ad – not because we are planning necessarily on shopping at John Lewis but because it invariably has the ah factor; it tells a story; it is sweet without being cloying; it puts us in the mood for Christmas.

And then there was the Iceland ad. The one that has been banned by the advertising powers that be. If you haven’t seen it, do seek it out on youtube: it has gone viral – and I could suggest, cynically, that it was produced with that in mind – to be banned and get far more attention than it otherwise would. But I won’t because, as an ex-advertising manager, both for a large company and later for an advertising agency, I don’t really want to believe that any of us would go to all the effort, time and money to produce an advert, but planning for it never to be aired.

Be all that as it may: we have a banned piece of television advertising which has spawned an online petition signed by upwards of 800,000 people – myself included, although I don’t often do stuff like that.

It concerns itself with the environmental impact of palm oil production on the rain forests and its impact on the orang utan population. It is powerful and emotionally effective. But it was banned because it was deemed too political. ..

Now, forgive me if I’m wrong, but the political is surely a way in which we order our social relations, isn’t it? We engage with the questions of the day that matter to how we live our lives, both in relation to other people and in relation to God. And there are other adverts that do that and don’t get banned…. But the Iceland ad gets banned.

Why? Well maybe because it tackles head-on public affairs relating to our country’s stance rather than our private and personal one. It’s ok to sell by means of sexual innuendo – think Cadbury’s Flake and many others – but not if it engages with policies that are at odds with our national interests, as it were. They are making a distinction suggesting that our public relations and our private attitudes can be poles apart…

There is the story of a preacher preaching on the book of Genesis, who was taken to task afterwards by a man who complained that he hadn’t preached on the literal take of the Creation of the world in six days. The preacher asked him what he did for a living. Well, said the man, I have a doctorate in geological engineering and I’m in the mining industry. So, said the preacher, do you use the text literally: believe in a six-day Creation and the world being only a few thousand years old? And the man said, no I don’t, because that’s what I pay you to do. He was making a clear distinction between his public day to day life and his private and personal religiosity; they were kept entirely separate.

But you can’t do faith like that and you really can’t do life like that either.

We are in danger of losing sight of a sound basis by which to order our social relations. And there are clear consequences to the social order if we end up destroying large chunks of Creation. We live in apocalyptic times – where apocalyptic simply means thinking about the end times.

Today’s gospel reading comes from what we now call Holy Week. The description in the gospel is a description of our present time – wars and rumours of wars, and political chaos brought about by the whole issue of Brexit.

Although they did not know it, Peter, James, John and Andrew were living in the calm before the storm. They had been with Jesus from the beginning. They had seen him cast out demons, heal the sick, feed the hungry and raise the dead. They had also heard him tell them that he must suffer and die and rise again.

And all through the Gospel they had struggled to understand all of this. How could the beginning of the rule of God involve his suffering and death? And yet, within days they would see it all unfold.

The theologian John Fenton wrote this about the teaching of Jesus on the Mount of Olives: just as Jesus’ way to glory was through shame and humiliation, so it will be for the world also. Evil will have its way, and work itself out, destroying everything. It is parasitic and can only live by destroying its host. The disciples are not to underestimate how long this will take. They were not to be misled by those who think it is the end before it really is.

It is a hard message; but as today’s reading from Hebrews makes clear, our role is not to sit on the side-lines watching it all happen, nor to run around in circles panicking. The kingdom of God is indeed close. But Jesus is the hope that evil cannot and will not win. His shame and humiliation were not an end, but a beginning. God will lead us too through those to his Kingdom, just like the terrified disciples were led to an empty tomb and then on to Galilee to meet with the risen Christ once more.

The writer of Hebrews is exhorting us to hold onto our hope, and to encourage one another in love and good deeds; meeting regularly together and supporting each other in those aims. That is the mission God calls us to, and that is the message we heard very strongly from Bishop John at Deanery Synod on Wednesday evening – that if we pray and study to deepen our own faith, we will become what he called resilient communities of faith, able to cope with whatever uncertainties come our way.

We are not called to sit on our hands and wait, while we try to work out when the end of the world will come. In this Kingdom Season just before Advent, we are called to repent and believe the good news – the good news that God’s kingdom is real; that God’s kingdom is good; and that God’s kingdom is near at hand.

In Jesus own words: do not be alarmed.

**Amen**