

Pablo Picasso, the French artist once said: *All children are artists. The problem is how to remain an artist once you grow up.* I heard this quote watching a movie called *The Holdovers*. The film, available on Netflix, is about a school rather like ours. The term ends, and it is time to go home for Christmas; but unfortunately for one boy, his parents make him stay at school for the break, because they are going on holiday. The heating is switched off in this fictional school, so the remainder has to stay in the equivalent of our health centre, with nothing to do. The boy, expelled from three schools previously, is probably the same age as those in the Lower Sixth. He is stuck for the whole Christmas vacation in the company of a peculiar teacher, and a sad dinner lady (an Oscar winning performance for her in this film, called *The Holdovers*.)

At some point I will have to say: *this story is a bit like Advent*, or else this will become more of a film review than a sermon; but first, a bit more about the movie. The boy is gutted. The teacher is awkward. The days are long. And yet, against expectation, things begin to change for the better. He persuades his reluctant captors to take him out. On small trips. Into the world. At one point, with new friends, he makes a glorious mess with paint. As Picasso said: *all children are artists*. Grown adults begin see a new perspective because they have been dared to be young again. The boy is given space to breathe, and to grow. And as that space opens up, his creativity begins to surface. Something locked down begins to be unlocked.

*And this story is a bit like Advent*. Advent is awkward and unfinished. The world is still cold. The problems are not solved. The joy is coming, but it is not here yet. And right in the middle of that waiting, God, who is older than the universe, does something unexpectedly youthful: he brings life and salvation. The prince of peace is born when we least expected

Isaiah saw a world trained for war, but his prophecy paints a peaceful, creative picture for God's people. Isaiah – the oracle of Advent prophesies: *He shall judge between the nations, and shall decide disputes for many peoples; and they shall beat their swords into ploughshares, and their spears into pruning-hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more.* The prophet is describing a united people melting down their weapons and turning them into tools for growing crops. The same metal, refashioned for a creative purpose. God does not scrap the world and start with new materials. He reshapes what already exists. Artists turn raw material into meaning. God does the same with history. Every day you choose whether your energy is used to wound or to build. God's future is not obsessed with breaking things, but making things.

This is where Christ steps into the centre of everything; he is the Divine Artist, through whom all things were made. In Jesus, God enters the mess. God puts his hands into the paint. He takes on flesh and begins to re-shape humanity from the inside. Everyone is included. The tired, the cynical, the wounded, the hopeful, the unsure, the middle-aged, the elderly. All of us are still clay in the Artist's hands.

St Paul says: now is the time to wake up. Because Christ does not wait for us to be fully formed before he calls us. He calls us in the middle of becoming.

And this is where Advent becomes real. Preparing the way for Christ means allowing ourselves to be reshaped. Risking creativity again; trying and failing; learning and improving. It means not letting adulthood paralyse our creativity. It means using what you have been given; and placing it back into the hands of the Artist who first imagined you.

*All children are artists. Yet Picasso's quandary: The problem is how to remain an artist once you grow up.* Advent points us to the answer: to Christ, the Divine Artist, who is still at work in you and me: teaching us, again and again, how to paint God's picture with our lives. All of us are still God's children.

Brothers and sisters, more pressing than Christmas jumper day on Friday is our deeper calling this Advent: to put on the Lord Jesus Christ: to wear him, as St Paul says, like a garment. Clothed in Christ, and walking in the light that God first created, we are invited to live in God's daytime: awake, hopeful, courageous and creative.

So let us not shrink back into grey routine, nor bury the colours we have been given. But let us dare, this Advent, to live as artists again. And so, with the Church in every age, let us go rejoicing to the house of the Lord.