

Sermon

Advent 1, Year B

Mark 13:24-37

Jesus said, “In those days, after that suffering, the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will be falling from heaven, and the powers in the heavens will be shaken.

Then they will see ‘the Son of Man coming in clouds’ with great power and glory. Then he will send out the angels, and gather his elect from the four winds, from the ends of the earth to the ends of heaven.

“From the fig tree learn its lesson: as soon as its branch becomes tender and puts forth its leaves, you know that summer is near. So also, when you see these things taking place, you know that he is near, at the very gates. Truly I tell you, this generation will not pass away until all these things have taken place. Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.

“But about that day or hour no one knows, neither the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. Beware, keep alert; for you do not know when the time will come. It is like a man going on a journey, when he leaves home and puts his slaves in charge, each with his work, and commands the doorkeeper to be on the watch. Therefore, keep awake—for you do not know when the master of the house will come, in the evening, or at midnight, or at cockcrow, or at dawn, or else he may find you asleep when he comes suddenly. And what I say to you I say to all: Keep awake.”

Prayer: In the Name of God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.

Sermon:

Today's Gospel sounds kind of dire.

After a casual read you might think that Jesus
was talking about the "End Times".

Many faithful Christians do think so.

St. Paul had probably heard about Jesus' predictions.

He had that Jesus preached about all hell, literally,
breaking loose:

"Truly I tell you, this generation will not pass away...." etc. etc.

In fact, as we know from today Epistle,

Paul was confident that

"the revealing of our Lord..." was just around the corner. ⁱ

Jesus thought the End of Things *was* coming soon.

He said he didn't know *what* it would look like, *and*

he didn't know *when* it would happen,

But it seems like he thought it would be pretty quick.ⁱⁱ

This has always been scary stuff.

It freaked out the disciples.ⁱⁱⁱ It *still* freaks people out.

Every year it seems like someone says that some earthquake,
or some skirmish, or some disease is The Sign...
the End Times are here.

But then that thing, whatever it is, passes. And we are *still here*.
Still plugging away.

Aren't we kind of pretentious?
I mean if Jesus didn't know when,
why should we think we will?

Isn't it kind of presumptuous for us to imagine
that we can sort out what Jesus couldn't? ^{iv}

But, anyway, for some of the faithful,
Advent is a time of *waiting for judgment*.
For others it's a time of *waiting for salvation*.

And meanwhile, down here, Everything isn't rosy.
There is all kind of stuff going on. Always will be.

God of all power, Ruler of the Universe...At your command all things came to be:
the vast expanse of interstellar space, galaxies, suns,
the planets in their courses, and this fragile earth, our island home.

From the primal elements you brought forth the human race, and blessed us
with memory, reason, and skill. You made us the rulers of creation.

But we turned against you, and betrayed your trust;
and we turned against one another.

Again and again, you called us to return. . . .

And in the fullness of time you sent your only Son, born of a woman,
to fulfill your Law, to open for us the way of freedom and peace. ^v

But, still, Langston Hughes wrote:

*I am so tired of waiting,
Aren't you,
For the world to become good
And beautiful and kind?*^{vi}

Some of us view Advent as a time of waiting, for a better world.

Waiting for Jesus to come, to overturn the tables of life.

Staring out the window, as life goes by,

Some of us wait for a SIGN.

And it isn't just us! We didn't invent this stuff!

700 years before Jesus, Isaiah stared out his window and begged

"Oh that thou wouldst rend the heavens and come down".^{vii}

One way or the other, a lot of people, either in the pews

or watching on FaceBook at home, and lots of preachers,

still wait. And they wait. And they wait.

Very, very, very patient.

Is Advent about waiting?

Is Advent about people waiting - for God - to come to us?

And when God does come,

Will it be the same God who drowned the Egyptians soldiers,
as they chased the Israelites across the Red Sea?

A lot of husbands and Daddy's who never came home.

Or will it be the Lamb of God, born in a manger?

Maybe Advent is less about waiting.

Maybe Advent is less about longing for a better day,
in a world finally repaired from the damage of its sins.

Today is the 1st Sunday in Advent.

The first day of our new church year!

Maybe Advent is not about what or when.

Maybe Advent is about now.

Maybe it is about our New Year!

Maybe it is about our New Chance,
to do what God has always called us to do.

Advent isn't about endings. It's about beginnings.

It isn't only about the End of the World,

It's about God rebuilding the world,
The way God usually works:
through each of us and through our Church.

Advent is about our New Year, our new chance
to live more fully, more faithfully, and more patiently.

Advent is not so much about praying for an end to the Darkness,
as it is but working, with Jesus, towards the Light.

Advent is not so much about being hung up on an
immortal life in heaven, as it is about working here,
in the real world, to bring Christ to those
who are hungry, and lonely and tired and sad. ^{viii}

I pray that this Advent each of us --- NO, ALL of us! -
will hear God's call to service.

It's Advent! Start your new Christian year.
Let us be whatever God calls us to be,
tin this New Advent Kingdom.

Work in the Light. Let that light heal you!
And then, as you are healing – and when you are healed -
follow Jesus' path – follow his light - into the world,
to do whatever he may call you to do.

Whoever you are, wherever you are, with whatever you have.

It's Advent! Our Lord will come, but he tarries still.

Start your new Christian year. Move forward in faith.

It's Advent! It's our New Year!

While the Lord tarries, while we await his call to infinity,
let us seek the place where he has called us to work.

For me, that place is here, with you.

And I love you all.

Let's follow Jesus' lead out into the world.

-AMEN

ⁱ See, today's Epistle, 1 Corinthians 1:3-9

ⁱⁱ See, today's Gospel, Mark 13:24-37, "But about that day or hour no one knows, neither the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. Beware, keep alert; for you do not know when the time will come ... suddenly. And what I say to you I say to all: Keep awake."

ⁱⁱⁱ Because Jesus made his comments on the Mount of Olives, near Jerusalem, this passage is sometimes referred to as the Olivet Discourse. According to Mark's gospel, all this happened just a few days before Jesus was crucified. He knew quite well what he was facing; many had gone to the cross before him. One disciple said, "Look, Teacher, what wonderful stones and what wonderful buildings!" And Jesus said to him, "... There will not be left here one stone upon another, that will not be thrown down." And some asked him "... when will this be, and what will be the sign...?" (see, Mark 13:1-4 RSV)

^{iv} Whatever may be the claim, I am reminded of the old saw, "Follow the money".

^v [https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Page:Book_of_common_prayer_\(TEC,_1979\).pdf/370](https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Page:Book_of_common_prayer_(TEC,_1979).pdf/370)

^{vi} James Mercer Langston Hughes February 1, 1901 – May 22, 1967) was an American poet, social activist, novelist, playwright, and columnist from Joplin, Missouri.
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Langston_Hughes

^{vii} I felt like that in San Francisco, 1979. Staring out the window of my friends Victorian, having moved away from my French hippie friends in the area that is now called SOMA. Almost broke, no job, no car, no cigarettes, no girlfriend; a crummy guitarist, I wondered what was going to come. *C'est une maison bleue, adossée à la colline, on y vient à pied, on ne frappe pas, ceux qui vivent là ont jeté la clé...*. 2 Kings 16.7ff; see William A. VanGemeren, *Reinterpreting the Prophetic Word: An Introduction to the Prophetic Literature of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1990): 250. In Isaiah's time, Assyria had conquered, and scattered, the northern kingdom of Israel; the southern kingdom, which was his home, was an Assyrian vassal.

^{viii} See, <http://archive.theadventboston.org/sermons/sw113014.htm>