

Isaiah 64:1-9
80:1-7
1:3-9

Advent 1B Psalm
St Barnabas, Bainbridge Island 1 Corinthians
December 3, 2017 Mark 13:3-9
The Rev. Karen Haig

Called Into Relationship

“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. And what I say to you I say to all: Keep awake.” Mark 13:32-33;37

What an extraordinary thing to hear on this first Sunday of Advent. Why on earth would the Gospel writer tell us that we do not know the day or the hour when the Son of God will come. We know exactly when he'll come, don't we? In fact we even know where he'll arrive. The Son of God, both human and divine, will arrive as the baby Jesus in the stable in Bethlehem, on December 25th... right?

Our Advent scripture readings – those readings we hear on the four Sundays before Christmas, surprise me every single year. At first glance, they don't seem very – well –Christmasy. They seem other worldly, apocalyptic even, and in the midst of all of the chaos and darkness in our world right now, I can tell you that I would really prefer to hear the angel Gabriel announce to Mary that she is about to become the mother of God so that we can live happily ever after with Jesus! I long for a return to the peace and calm assuredness of mother Mary saying “Let it be unto me according to your word.” I am so ready to hear that the sweet baby Jesus is about to be born and that it's time for all of us to turn inward so that every heart can begin to prepare him room.

But that simply isn't what we get on this first Sunday of Advent. Here, on this very first day of a brand new Christian year, on this very first day with your brand new Rector, on this very first day of a whole new life together, the Holy Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ tells us it's the end of the world. Listen...

*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 and we will see the Son of Man coming in the clouds...*
Mark 13:24-26

That is a such a different image from the serene and beautiful young Madonna with her babe wrapped in snowy white swaddling cloth, both of them glowing with that mysterious Caravaggio light that seems to emanate from deep inside. Quite the contrary... the sun goes black, the moon goes dark - even the twinkling stars disappear, falling from the sky, one by one. And yet, in the midst of all of this chaos and darkness, especially in the midst of all of this chaos and darkness, God comes. God comes.

It's tempting to hear this "little apocalypse" in Mark's gospel and to get ourselves fixated on the Second Coming, thereby conveniently relegating this scripture to a future that isn't here yet and consequently doesn't really seem to ask anything of us. But I think what Jesus is inviting us to do is something very different. Rather than considering the abstract notion of a distant, unknowable future, I think Jesus is inviting us to grasp the reality that is right before us in the here and now: the God who comes, who is always coming into our lives and our stories, comes to renew and empower and transform. I think what Jesus is saying to us is that we become most alive - that our lives become most Christ-like... when we join with God in healing the world... when, instead of fixing our sights on some distant and unknown future Second Coming, we fix our sights on the next coming. And the next coming. And the one after that.

Where do we see God coming? This is the Advent question. Where do we see God coming? Because God is always, always coming. The God who created the world out of chaos, who made a raggedy bunch of grumblers in the desert into God's very own people, the God who began the Church with a little band of terrified disciples in an upper room, the God who turned death into life... this is the God who is always coming, always creating, always making things new.

What's the first sentence in the Bible? *In the beginning, God created...* *Genesis 1:1*

And in the last chapter of the last book of the Bible, what does God say? *Behold, I make all things new.* *Revelation 21:5* After so much long history, at the very end of time, God is still making things new, because that is who God is.

Now the problem with God always coming and always making everything new, is that most of us tend to get pretty comfortable with the way things are... and when things are being made new, it can feel pretty uncomfortable. I can think of one hundred examples of that for myself in this very moment, because for me, it really does feel like God is making everything new – from the mysterious filing system on the Rector's computer, to most everyone of you whose stories I don't yet know. God is making all things new and while that can all be very exciting, we wonder, What will this mean for us? Where is God taking us?

That's a very natural, and quite frankly, very biblical response. Who, me? Samuel said. Not me, I stutter, Moses said. And when the Lord God said to Abram "Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you." Can you imagine what he must have been thinking? WHAT? Just leave? Leave family, home, and country? TO GO WHERE? I will show you, says God. And I will be with you.

Now thankfully God doesn't ask of most of us what God asked of Abram. Most of us aren't being called to leave our homes and our families and our countries... and yet we can be assured that we are in fact being called into something new. Even as God is calling every single one of us into new ways of loving and being, God is calling our collective community too. Because, you see, the God who is always coming is the same God who is always calling us to come too. Calling us out of the comfortable and certain

places into God's future of – well, we don't know exactly what future God is calling us in to. But we do know it will be a future rich in justice and mercy and love. And still, we wonder: What will it be like? Will I be safe? How will we know what to do or how to be? And God simply says *I am always with you. Matthew 28:20*. Always. Until the end of time. It's a promise we can count on as we make our journey through Advent in this very special time of watching and waiting and great expectation.

You are a people who know a lot about watching and waiting and great expectation. You've been doing that in a very obvious way in the search for your new Rector. Your deeply faithful and committed Search Committee spent a great deal of time watching and listening to all of the people who felt called to you and to this place. They waited with great expectation for the movement of God's Holy Spirit to show them the way. They were prayerful and discerning, diligent and patient as God's call to them became clearer and clearer. It took a lot of time, and while there was a lot of watching and waiting and great expectation, they knew God was with them.

And all the while, you too were watching and waiting for the particular pastor who would be for you a good and faithful companion in the mission and ministry of this parish. And what is so beautiful about your watching and waiting was that it was never, ever passive. So many of you stepped into leadership roles. So many of you offered to serve in ways you hadn't imagined you would serve. So many of you remembered and held up everything that has ever been good about this community, leading the way from strength to strength, from the good place you had been in to God's new future for this community. And while you watched and waited, you loved and you served, you held hope and you knew yourselves to be the church... and that, my dears, is a beautiful, beautiful thing.

And so, on this very first day of a new Christian year, on this very first day with your new Rector, on this very first day of a whole new life together, old worlds are ending, God is making all things new and we know that WE are the way God will do that. The gift of Advent is time set apart to watch and to wait with great expectation for the God who is always coming, who is always calling, the God who has promised to be with us always. The God who came to us long ago as a tiny baby boy born in a stable, the God who comes to us each day in both the suffering and the kindness of humanity, and the God who will continue to come to us in ways more marvelous than we could ever ask or even imagine, has called us together. How beautiful to begin our life together in Advent, the time when we keep watch, and together, we prepare the way of the Lord. Blessed are the ones who come in the name of the Lord, and blessed are you who make such a welcome. Amen.