

# Sermon: Advent IV

The Rev. Mike Wernick

November 30, 2014

Year B

Isaiah 64:1-9

Psalm 80:1-7, 16-18

1 Corinthians 1:3-9

Mark 13:24-37

It's only a few more weeks... until the Christ Child is born... but in our seven-week Advent readings... which connect the *reason* for his coming... to his birth... the cosmic imagery in today's Gospel... almost like a science fiction movie... continues to highlight the importance of Jesus' message... to not hear him... to not listen... would be like having one's word turned upside down... would be like having the sun go dark... to not heed the message Jesus brings would be like walking in the dark at night... with no moonlight to guide our steps... to not remain awake when the Master of the house is expected back... would be to disrupt the very stars that God set in the dome of the sky...

Theologian Christopher Hutson writes... from the standpoint of Mark's original readers... around 70 CE... much of this speech would sound like a commentary on the Jewish revolt against Rome and the subsequent destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple... and especially after Jesus' prediction that the Temple *would be* destroyed... the speech responds to the question of *when*... the calamity reflects Jesus' statement that... *this generation will not pass away until all these things have taken place*...

In the last few decades... we've become used to seeing controlled implosions of buildings... carefully timed fuses and carefully placed bundles of dynamite... that explode like a well-choreographed ballet... bringing down in a few seconds... in a controlled way... a massive building... without so much as breaking a window in the building just next to it... but the destruction of the Temple... even when it happened a second time... is beyond our understanding... it was so integral to the common life of

the Jews... so critical to their worship... that its destruction... was like the sun... moon... stars... and indeed the heavens themselves... being shaken beyond belief...

If you saw the movie Avatar... then you saw the destruction of the sacred Na'vi... HomeTree... and if you saw this... then you saw the looks of disbelief... anguish... and absolute devastation on their faces... when they witnessed the destruction of what was the center of their lives... and if you saw this... then you know just a little about how the Jews felt... when Jerusalem and the Temple were destroyed... when *they* were separated from that which gave them life... and that which gave life meaning... and how it put them into a time of waiting...

Advent is about waiting... and accountability... and today's Gospel continues the themes and the images we've heard about for the last few weeks... about being locked out of the party... of not being seen... about being thrown into outer darkness... about going into punishment...

Theologian Martin Copenhaver wrote... neither those who waited for the first coming of the Messiah... nor those who wait for his return now... know when he (or she) will appear... but we do know when Christmas will arrive... it may even be circled on our calendars... and by anticipating the *return* of the Son of Man now... we wait... just like those who lived before Jesus was born... waited... not knowing the day or the hour when he... would appear...

But there are different kinds of waiting... someone who stands on a street corner waiting for the bus to arrive... experiences a passive waiting... but that same person waiting on the same corner... hearing the sound of the parade that's just out of sight... will experience a different kind of waiting... it will be one full of expectation... waiting on tiptoe... an active waiting... that's why the virgins needed to get oil for their lamps... why the slaves were asked to invest in themselves... and why the King asked those at his right and at his left... whether they saw the face of Christ in those who were hungry or

naked... like them... we hopefully wait... but we remain engaged in the world while we wait... that kind of active waiting... waiting in preparation... is also a part of Advent...

And today's text raises one of the most important paradoxes of the Gospel... the already / not yet quality of the divine drama in which we live... Jesus has *already* established the means by which we are drawn into relationship with God... but we do *not yet* live in complete communion with God... the realm of God is *already* evident... but that realm is *not yet* fully established... that's why... once again... Jesus ends this passage... with a familiar charge about our awareness... our consciousness... *And what I say to you... I say to all: Keep awake...*

Now when we're young... it may take all of our attention and focus just to tie our shoes... but as we get older... we don't even need to think about it... when we're a bit older... it may take a lot of concentration to write out our letters and numbers... but as we prepare... we can write a paper in long hand while the radio's on... when we're even older... it may take most of our attention as we learn to drive... but as we gain more familiarity... we're able to drive safely... even while we're thinking about other things or having a conversation... and when we look back... we may wonder how there was ever a time when we couldn't do these things...

But when Jesus says: Keep awake!... he refers again to the mind of Christ... he's talking about owning a deeply established... and unchanging awareness... that witnesses everything we do... it's the experience of the silent... eternal observer... and as we grow into being fully awake... we will identify less with the small self... and more with the eternal Self... it's like the difference between being a boat that's tossed on stormy waves... and experiencing the stillness of the ocean at its deepest point... it's being grounded in the silence all around us... but being aware of the waves above us...

Some have called this *dual consciousness*... and Meister Eckhart... the thirteenth century German mystic... has imagined it as a door and a hinge... the door swings

back and forth engaged in what is happening... but the hinge remains grounded and steady... anchoring the door and allowing it to move freely... the moving worker and the unmoved watcher... living side-by-side... reflecting our full human potential...

Images of the sun... moon... and stars... being darkened... not shining their light... would shake our very foundations... but our lives have been marked by events which felt like the cosmos shifted on its axis... events which made pivotal changes in how we experience the world... the Cuban missile crisis... the assassination of JFK... the Apollo moon landing... the attack on 9/11... all harbingers of great change... that connect us to first century Jews...

Jesus reminds us that there are some things... some signs... which tip us off to an impending change... like tender fig tree branches that put forth their leaves... and there are other events which come... or seem to come... if we're not awake... without warning... and we can feel like doors swinging in the wind... or like steady hinges...

I continue to grieve at how much human potential goes unrealized... we are really capable... probably in a generation or two... of solving most of the world's pressing problems... in ways that benefit the many... instead of the few... that we already have the creativity and the resources... to come together in unprecedented ways... we have already been given the Advocate... the Holy Spirit... to lead us in new ways... we just need to embrace the gifts she brings... and change the systems that work against us...

Richard Rohr wrote: *to be fully conscious would be to love everything... even our mistakes... which are our enemies... to love is to fall into full consciousness... which is non-dualistic... and includes everything... even the last enemy to be destroyed, which is death itself.... that's why we mustn't be afraid of death... God, who is Universal Consciousness itself, knows all things, absorbs all things, and forgives all things... for being what they are. And if Jesus commands us to love our enemies... then we know that God will do the same...*

I wrote in an article for next month's newsletter... that I believe the end times are not about some mass migration from a doomed world to a blessed heaven... that if they are times... rather than a single moment... then they're more of a process... rather than a single cosmic event... an end of this era of war and violence... injustice and oppression... it's a process of the Earth's transformation... not about it's devastation... it's about a world of justice and peace.... but it's also... got to be... about our active participation in it... not our passive waiting for the bus to arrive.

And I believe that as we grow into a stable hinge instead of a swinging door... as we identify with the grounded-ness of the ocean bottom instead of its stormy waves... it will be far more fulfilling to wait for the parade...and when we do that... we'll not only wonder how we were ever satisfied to wait for the bus... but we really will participate with God in bringing about the world promised by Christmas! Holy God... make it so.

Mike+