

## **Church of the Divine Love**

### **Sermon First Sunday of Advent November 29<sup>th</sup>, 2020**

Isaiah 64: 1-9; Psalm 80: 1-7, 16-18; 1 Corinthians 1: 3-9; Marc 13:24-37

#### **Dear people of God,**

Today is a special day, and not just a day, but the beginning of a special season, Advent. During Advent we focus on waiting, waiting for the Second Coming of Jesus, and during the week before Christmas our waiting changes to waiting for our celebration of the birth of Jesus.

Anytime we wait we do so because we expect something to happen; we wait for a bus or train because we expect it to arrive. When we are wait for a bus or train, we cannot see it coming but hope it will come. During Advent we are waiting for the Second Coming of Jesus because the Second Coming of Jesus will bring all God's plans for the world to completion. As we wait in hope for the Second Coming of Jesus, we know he is with us in so many ways especially in the sacraments. So, during Advent we are conscious of the fact that God is present with us while we wait for the fulfillment of God's plans.

The words of Jesus in the Gospel today express the mood of this early part of the Advent season, "Be on your guard, stay awake, because you never know when the time will come." (Mark 13:33). In the first reading today, the Jews expressed hope in God even when going through a difficult time and so we heard glimpses of hope in that reading. In the First Reading today, we have words from the prophet Isaiah. This section of Isaiah is written, at the time when the Jewish people were up in Babylon and praying to God that they would be able to return to their own country and rebuild their temple and once again be at peace in their own homes. It was a desperate time because they were enslaved. It was a time when many felt that God had abandoned them. And that's why Isaiah says, "Would that you would rend the heavens and come down as you did in the olden days with Moses and the people who were in slavery in Egypt and the wonders that you did. "Why do you not see us? Yes, we have sinned, but you are a forgiving God, you care for us. Why do you hide from us? Is it that you're angry with us?"

Advent is a time for hope. And Advent is a time for telling the truth, about our weariness and our anxieties and also about God's relentless love for all the world. Today's gospel pulls back the curtain on false hopes and realities in order to reveal God's commitment to enter into and redeem our lives and world. Mark's Jesus wants to reassure his disciples that despite the difficulty of their current circumstances, justice is coming. The disciples' job is to be vigilant, to be on watch for God, even when they feel helpless. Because God remains at work in the world. Because God is on the loose in the world!

Mark's gospel begins and ends with the idea that the power of God is on the loose in the world. Of all the ways Mark could have started telling his story, he doesn't begin with birth narratives or angelic announcements as in Luke, or lengthy genealogies as in Matthew, or theological poetics as in John. Mark's gospel begins with the long-awaited Messiah, the beloved Son of God, being empowered to overcome evil and proclaim the reign of God. The heavens are torn open at Jesus' baptism, and the Spirit descends upon him. The power of God is on the loose in the world. And at the end of the Mark's gospel, in the depiction of Jesus' death, as Jesus breathed his last, the curtain of temple was torn in two, and in the sixteenth chapter Mary Magdalene and Mary are told, "He has been raised; he is not here...Go, tell his disciples that he is going ahead of you..." God is still on the loose in the world.

In these advent days, let us remember that the power of God is already loose in the world, in the midst of pandemics, in the struggle for racial justice, and in the already and not yet of the divine drama in our lives, the power of God is loose in the here and now, and our task is to place our hope in that place. To keep watch. To be present. To pay attention to the places God is being born into our world. One of the great paradoxes of the gospel is that we live in the “already” and the “not yet.” In our Advent waiting, we proclaim that God has come into the world and is actively at work in the world, but God wasn’t finished making all things well, or bringing new life to places of death or making whole what is broken, We begin Advent acknowledging the ways we still need the Messiah to come. While we may not know exactly how, we believe that between the already and not yet, God is at work among us and ahead of us, ever and always healing and transforming, resurrection and redeeming. So, Keep watch. Be present. Pay attention for such things.

Advent invites us keep watch for God, looking for Christ in the people we cross paths with and Zoom with, in all that we do, and all the spaces we connect. That we might not just focus our attention in Advent on what is ahead, be that our celebrations of the birth of Christ or our hopes about the return of Christ, but hope-filled eyes that allow us to join in a present-tense advent, an advent focused on being awake to God in the world, a present tense advent that not only expects God’s arrival but assumes God’s ongoing presence in the here and now. In the midst of all of our preparations and our uncertainties, in the midst of isolation, let us keep watch for God, so that we might recognize Jesus, being born into a world in great need of healing and hope. Maybe we have invested our hope in success, our hope in riches, our hope in never seeing pain. Maybe these are the gods that have to come crashing down before we once again realize that we are here to share love, compassion, perfection. We are here to make a new world. Each generation must build a new world so that we come closer and closer to the final coming of the Lord.

This is why this season of Advent and for the upcoming Christmas season, let us all challenge ourselves to focus our Christmas joy and celebration on Christ, and to remember our sisters and brothers in our prayers, those who have no chance to celebrate Christmas because of difficulties and persecutions, and help whenever possible, by our own charitable actions. This means that we should be generous in sharing our joy with our fellow brethren, especially those who are poor and needy and without joy. Let us all make our upcoming Christmas celebrations more meaningful and wonderful by sharing our joy with one another and remembering that after all it was God Who has first shared with us His joy and love, by sending unto us, His most perfect gift of all for us, Christ, His own Beloved Son, to be Our Lord, Savior and Redeemer. May all of us have a blessed season of Advent, and may God be with us always in this journey of faith. So, let us enter Advent in hope, even hope against hope. Let us see visions of love and peace and justice. Let us affirm with humility, with joy, with faith, with courage: Jesus Christ—the life of the world.

**Let us pray:**

Gracious God, As the Advent season begins, we cry out to you. We come to you looking for hope. When everything else we rely on fails us, our only hope is in you. When we do not understand what has happened, we hope in you. We can hope for better days because we trust you. We know you and we know you are here with us no matter what we are facing. Some of us see only darkness this time of year. Some of us find life overwhelming. Some of us are filled with Advent joy. Wherever we find ourselves today, Loving God, remind us that our hope is in you. Be with us on this journey. **Amen.**

