

First Sunday of Advent B

Isaiah 64:1-9

Psalm 80:1-7, 17-19

1 Corinthians 1:3-9

Mark 13:24-37

As Paul greets the Corinthians in his letter to them, so too, do I greet you today:

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

I can't tell you how happy I am that we are finally out of the season of Pentecost.

In case you hadn't noticed, these last few weeks have been filled with readings proclaiming

Woe and destruction,

Fire and brimstone,

Weeping and gnashing of teeth

Oh my goodness, who wants to listen to that, let alone preach on it!

Week after week we were reminded of

our own sinfulness,

our own inadequacy,

our own fallacies,

our mistakes,

our excuses,

our whoopsies and oopsies,

and everything else we really would rather keep to ourselves.

If you are just as tired of these types of readings as I am...

Good.

Somehow, I think... that was the point.

Some of us have been waiting weeks for Advent to come. But what are we waiting for?

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The more I use the Revised Common Lectionary, the more I am convinced that we don't give it enough credit.

For me, let's face it, after All Saints' Day, I could move straight into Advent and do without those nasty, uncomfortable lessons. Why do we have to listen to those, anyway?

I was about ready to throw up my hands and say, "Enough already! Enough!"

And lo and behold, I looked at today's readings.

"O that you would tear open the heavens and come down!"

"Make your name known to your adversaries!"

"Do not be exceedingly angry, O Lord, and do not remember our iniquity forever!"

"Enough already, enough!"

The frustration that I have experienced these past few weeks comes to an ultimate finale on this, the first weekend of Advent.

As I said, I think I need to give the Revised Common Lectionary a little more credit.

And if I thought I had it bad, being oh so inconvenienced by these past few weeks, the readings today snapped me back to reality so hard I think I have whiplash.

You see, for me, these readings were just that... readings.

For others, they are daily cries for help that too often go unheard.

Isaiah's preaching echoes the lament being shouted by the Judeans in exile.

"Enough already, enough!" they cry.

"How much more are we supposed to take, God, how much more! We NEED you!"

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They felt like God had abandoned them. With all of the terrible things they've gone through, how can anyone say that there is a God. What kind of a God would allow this to happen to a chosen people?

These same cries are shouted over and over again by people suffering persecution and oppression.

So again, what are we waiting for?

Well, I can tell you what our brothers and sisters are waiting for, those who live on pennies a day, those who wonder if tonight the army will show up at their houses and take away their loved ones, never to be seen again.

They look for Mark. They eagerly wait to see the Son of Man coming in clouds with great power and glory.

Their salvation is marked by the coming of angels gathering the elect from the four winds, from the ends of the earth to the ends of the earth.

They are waiting for deliverance from their oppression and persecution, their poverty and powerlessness, from death itself.

What are we waiting for?

Advent. The season of waiting.

Are we waiting for Christmas Day, when we get to open our presents?

Or Christmas Day, the day when we celebrate the birth of Jesus of Nazareth, Immanuel, "God with us?"

Not anymore. All that is behind us. We know the story. We know its beginning and its middle and its... end?

Or do we?

Advent is not just about remembering the birth of Christ. Christ DID come, Immanuel, “God with us”, and died for the redemption of humanity. But there is still war. There is still persecution. There is still violence and oppression.

What are we waiting for?

Listen: “But 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.”

God’s not done yet. If there were nothing left to do, there would be no reason for the church to proclaim the Gospel, the Good News of Jesus Christ. There would be no reason to do... *anything* Christ told us to do.

God’s not done yet. And THAT’S what we are waiting for.

Advent. The season of waiting. The season of working.

One cannot get any work done while they sleep, and so we are told, “Keep awake!” We don’t know when God’s work in this world will be finished, and so we wait vigilantly, not wanting to be caught asleep when the work is completed.

We do this *not* because we are afraid of being left behind. Rather, we keep awake so that we can continue to do God’s work in the world, as we are able, until God returns to finish it.

With the end of Pentecost and the beginning of Advent, we realize that we have reached the breaking point. We can’t do it all ourselves. We’ve tried for too long.

So we cry out to God again, “Come!”

And as we look out over the chasm before us, a divide that leads us to despair and hopelessness, we hear an echo return—but not in our words. Instead, we hear these words echoed back to us from across the great divide:

“Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. I am coming.” Amen.

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