

## Watch, and Be Faithful

Happy Advent! Welcome to the season of pregnant anticipation! In Advent, we remember the first advent of Jesus at Christmas and we look forward to Jesus' *second* advent. As we begin, I would like to share with you a story from poet-priest Malcolm Guite.

"Imagine with me...some parallel universe where things are mostly the same, but one or two things are different." You are in a crowded city, and finally find a place on the bus behind two women. You overhear their conversation.

"I do love this time of year – just the beginning. Those first three weeks of December are so stress free; it's just lovely."

"The other one says, 'Yes. I love how there's just a little bit less fling and bling about the place. The way they draw those curtains quietly across the shop windows. You know there are lovely preparations behind those windows, but it's all very quiet and subdued.'

"The other one says, 'And you know – it's lovely not having so much pressure on the social calendar. We can be at home; we can be quiet. A special kind of calm seems to descend on the kids as well. It's nice not having the kids coming home, *completely* hyped up. You know they've been doing very gentle, quiet meditations, they've been lighting a few candles in the darkness. Isn't it lovely?'

"Yes,' says the other. 'It's just what you need. And isn't it beautiful on Christmas Eve? From that deep darkness *suddenly* there is a great opening. All the curtains are opened; the lights are on, only *then* on Christmas Eve. And there is a great beaming blaze and it's lovely.'

"The other says, 'Twelve days is about right I think. Twelve days is about as much Christmas as I can stand. We just love that contrast.'

"Instead of course, the reverse happens. We are tired of Christmas before we get there. We've had so much flung at us. We've had so many exhortations to buy stuff and do stuff and there's no moment of

transition; there's no moment of contrast; there's no moment we can speak the watchword of Advent: the people who walked in darkness have seen a marvelous light."<sup>1</sup>

This is something I love about our Lutheran tradition – we celebrate *not only* times of feast: Christmas and Easter; we honor the seasons of preparation which come before them: Advent and Lent. Perhaps in the past, we have utilized the season of Advent to count down the days until Christmas. We have eaten one chocolate a day until the big Christmas chocolate. We have marked our Advent weeks with the social events leading up to Christmas: our child's Christmas concert, the company Christmas party and obligatory Secret Santa gift, celebrations with *both* sides of our families, Cyber Monday deals and shopping for *just* the right gift, putting up the Christmas tree, cleaning and decorating the house, studying for finals, preparing for our annual winter vacation...

If the word "hectic" comes to mind when you think of the Advent season, you are not alone. But what if you did not equate Advent with "hectivity," but with "darkness"?

In our Gospel text this morning, darkness is pervasive. We heard of the sun being darkened, the moon not giving its light, and the stars falling from the sky (Mk 13:24 – 25a). We heard a warning of the master of the house arriving at any time – "whether in the evening, or at midnight, or when the rooster crows, or at dawn" (Mk 13:35b). We have a dark text, and there is likewise a darkness, or uncertainty, regarding *how* to interpret this text.

Let's journey *into* the darkness. I invite you to open your Bibles to the beginning of Mark 13, so that we can explore the larger context. Page 1006. Jesus has been teaching in the temple courts since chapter 11. As Jesus and his disciples are leaving the temple in chapter 13, Jesus' disciples comment on the magnificent, massive stones! In verse 2, Jesus asks them, "Do you see all these great buildings?...Not one stone here will be left on another; every one will be thrown down" (Mk 13:2).

It seems clear that Jesus is referring to the destruction of the temple. The temple in Jerusalem was destroyed in 70 A.D.

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<sup>1</sup> [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=\\_w8ey2q28ZY](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_w8ey2q28ZY)

The Gospel of Mark was written approximately 40 A.D., which means that Mark was written before or after the destruction of the temple? (Before.) Mark wrote his Gospel approximately 30 years before the temple was destroyed. Mark did not *see* the destruction of the temple. And Mark did not know *when* the destruction would take place.

In verses 3 and 4, Mark writes, “As Jesus [is] sitting on the Mount of Olives opposite the temple, Peter, James, John and Andrew [ask] him privately, ‘Tell us, when will these things happen? And what will be the sign that they are all about to be fulfilled?’” Peter, James, John, and Andrew want to know *when* the destruction of the temple will take place and what *sign* they will see to know its coming.

Jesus does not answer their question directly, but *warns* them. Verse 5. “Jesus [says] to them: ‘Watch out that no one deceives you. Many will come in my name, claiming, ‘I am he,’ and will deceive many. When you hear of wars and rumors of wars, do not be alarmed. Such things must happen, but the end is still to come. Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be earthquakes in various places, and famines. These are the beginning of birth pains” (Mk 13:5 – 8).

The disciples ask for signs, but Jesus does not *give* them signs. In his response, he gives a list: wars, rumors of wars, nation against nation, earthquakes, famines, and so on. These are the beginning of birth pains. Famines, wars, and earthquakes are the *beginning*, but are *not* the signs.

In verse 7, Jesus says, “The end is still to come.” And in verse 26, Jesus talks about the “Son of Man coming in clouds with great power and glory.” Now, is Jesus referring to “The End,” or is he referring to the destruction of the temple?

Perhaps, in chapter 13, Jesus is speaking about *both* the destruction of the temple *and* “The End.” Perhaps, Jesus thinks that the destruction of the temple can *be* “The End.” Or, the temple will be destroyed and later, “The End” will come. Jesus knows that both will happen, but when? Only the Father knows. In verse 32, Jesus says, “No one knows about that day or hour, not even the angels in heaven, nor the *Son*, but only the Father.”

So what does this mean for us, disciples of Jesus, 2,000 years later? Jesus' prophesy of the destruction of the temple has been fulfilled, and so we await "The End," when Jesus will come and gather his people. Since no one knows when this will take place nor signs of its appearing, we wait. And watch. We don't wait and watch for *signs*, but we wait and watch for Jesus' *coming*, his *advent*. As we confess in the words of the Apostles' Creed, Jesus "*will come again* to judge the living and the dead. And his kingdom will have no end."

All creation will one day be judged. The evil powers will fall. You and I will be judged.

Hear the good news, St. Timothy's Lutheran Church. Jesus will one day come again! He will gather his disciples to be with him forever, and his kingdom will have no end. All will be made right.

And so we wait. We wait for that day, when Jesus will come again to us and dwell with us. When we will be his people, and he will be with us and be our God. When he will wipe every tear from our eyes, when there will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things will have passed away (Rev 21:3 - 4).

We wait. Like the servant in charge of the master's house who doesn't know when he will return, we wait. We wait, not as owners, but as *stewards*, knowing that we will give an accounting of all that has been entrusted to us. How have we cared for our brothers and sisters? How have we cared for our coworkers or those who always seem to come into our lives at the most inconvenient times? How have we cared for the homeless, those with mental illness, those with different ideologies or orientations? How have we shared the love of Jesus with those around us?

How is the Spirit asking *you* to wait? Name it. Write it down on your bulletin. Take it home and pray that the Lord prepare room in *you* for the work of His Spirit.

May this Advent season be a time of preparation for you, a season of darkness faithfully awaiting the light of Jesus' second advent. Amen.