

“The Sure and Certain Hope and the Unknown”

1 Advent B Nov. 29, 2020 Rev. Dr. David Gardner Tweed

The Coming of the Son of Man

24 “But in those days, after that suffering, the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, 25 and the stars will be falling from heaven, and the powers in the heavens will be shaken.

26 Then they will see ‘the Son of Man coming in clouds’ with great power and glory. 27 Then he will send out the angels, and gather his elect from the four winds, from the ends of the earth to the ends of heaven.

The Lesson of the Fig Tree

28 “From the fig tree learn its lesson: as soon as its branch becomes tender and puts forth its leaves, you know that summer is near. 29 So also, when you see these things taking place, you know that he is near, at the very gates. 30 Truly I tell you, this generation will not pass away until all these things have taken place. 31 Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.

The Necessity for Watchfulness

32 “But about that day or hour no one knows, neither the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. 33 Beware, keep alert; for you do not know when the time will come. 34 It is like a man going on a journey, when he leaves home and puts his slaves in charge, each with his work, and commands the doorkeeper to be on the watch. 35 Therefore, keep awake—for you do not know when the master of the house will come, in the evening, or at midnight, or at cockcrow, or at dawn, 36 or else he may find you asleep when he comes suddenly. 37 And what I say to you I say to all: Keep awake.”

This Sunday marks the beginning of a new church year/cycle. In Advent, themes and texts are highlighted that show us God “Advanc-ing toward us;” in the past in Creation and the Prophets and Jesus; in the present through the Table Meal, Ministries of God in the world and the love and generosity expressed by God’s children; in the future in the Coming of God promised and the consummation of all things for us personally when we see God face to face and universally when all of the tomorrows become the history of what was and the fulfilment of what God intends.

Mark's gospel is the shortest gospel, written for those who already know the story and focusses on what it means to have this God-man come to Earth. There is no birth narrative but rather the Baptism is highlighted (Jesus is about 30) because it is the beginning of Jesus' official ministry. This passage is Jesus' response to the disciples asking when this arrival of God will take place....they're thinking of course more literally and in a way that expects a military style Messiah to arrive and upend all of the structures of power and vindicate all of God's Chosen ones. Little do they realize the plans in God's mind for how that actually will take place. Frequently in Mark the disciples just don't "get it." They confess Jesus as messiah, leader, Lord but have little/no idea of what that means.

VV 24-27 are classic eschatology (end-times) ideas from ancient Jewish thought. The end comes and is somehow reflected in "physical manifestations" which cause anxieties to rise. The faithful however are gathered/sheltered from the 4 'corners' of the earth – the author envisions the ancient idea of a flat earth bounded on most edges by mountains.

VV28-31 focus on the need for God's children to watch for and recognize the coming of holy things/God's presence much like Spring announces itself in the buds. God is always near; there is an imminence to this Promise.

VV32-37 focus on the unexpectedness of God's presence around you. Don't miss it being 'asleep' through your life.

There seem to be 3 sections to the reading: 1) God's presence does and will come; 2) learn to be eager for it and spot its arrival; 3) be alert because it may catch you unaware – it does not always announce itself far in advance.

A) In life we often find ourselves waiting in queue. Sometimes we are very clear what we are waiting for, other times its just part of the routine, still others its an unexpected delay or accident or speedbump to our daily plans. But when it comes to Life itself – its meaning, significance, purpose and aim – what are we waiting for? A guide? A truth teller about who we are or are meant to be when we grow up? Do we realize those answers can be forthcoming each and every day and in each of the many experiences we have including daily routine and profoundly poignant moments? Do we see the arrival of God's presence – of some truth about ourselves personally, or about humanity or about this blue

planet and our relationship to it? What do we actually see in the Covid19 experience...is it only the devastating nature of this virus or is God at work also? How can we point to it, partner with it and support efforts to respond to it? Where do we find the truth being told in its stormy midst?

- B) We are frequently wanting to grow up faster when we are young, slow down when we are raising a family, take a break when we are exhausted and stressed and retire from it all when we've "put our time in." What does this say about our opportunity and ability to enjoy the slow advance of the buds of the trees – to embrace the beauty of each chapter and the awareness of what the chapters of life mean? What is good about the chapter of life you are in and what it means as you prepare for the advancing arrival of the next chapter of life? Will you/Do you see God in the beautiful summer of life that is you right now? When is the last time you sabbatically paused and let the sun warm your face just because it was good to be alive and not just at the end of the day?
- C) The seasons of lights and parties is here – mostly this year via Zoom or some other video conference format. We also just went through the beginning of a potential season of social unrest and change. The very fabric of many traditions/practices and beliefs seems to be pulled and yanked due to the circumstances of current global life, understandings and practices. The sudden announcement of potential vaccines has lead to the best financial month for many stocks in 30 years. Where in all of this is our watchfulness? Are we looking for a way through it all? Out of it all? To gain something from it in our portfolio? Or to evolve in our society to a more complete sense of unity and equality? Where is our watchfulness for what God may be doing and inviting us into? And how can we be a part of it? Tending to the details of what is occurring is good – tending to our souls is critical. Be careful what your answers are – they may cause a change in the stars for your own life and that of others.....and isn't that where this text started?