

DOES IT HAVE TO BE LIKE THIS? WHAT ARE WE GOING TO DO?

God of unveiled truth, faithful flame in times of darkened sun and waning moon: lift up our unknowing hearts, and waken our sleeping love to announce the coming dawn of unexpected peace through Jesus Christ the one who is to come.

A Collect for the First Sunday of Advent, Prayers for An Inclusive Church

THE FIRST SUNDAY OF ADVENT

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

December 3, 2017

ST. MARK'S-IN-THE-VALLEY

EPISCOPAL CHURCH AND PRESCHOOL

Los Olivos, California

THE REV. RANDALL C.K. DAY, D.MIN., PRIEST AND RECTOR

THE GOSPEL READING: MATTHEW 25:31-46

Jesus said to his disciples, "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. Then they will see 'the Son of Man coming in clouds' with great power and glory. 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.

"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. So also, when you see these things taking place, you know that he is near, at the very gates. Truly I tell you, this generation will not pass away until all these things have taken place. Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.

"But about that day or hour no one knows, neither the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. Beware, keep alert; for you do not know when the time will come. 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. 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, or else he may find you asleep when he comes suddenly. And what I say to you I say to all: Keep awake."

In the gospel reading we have just heard, Jesus is speaking of cataclysm, violent upheaval of the known world.

It expresses what many have felt over the past year, as throughout the world, the social and political order, and the natural order all combine into a vision of

apocalypse. Meaningless violence of mass shootings as in the Texas church and Las Vegas, tens of millions of refugees roaming the world, displaced and stateless, floods, fires, global political unrest, religious extremism, harassment and abuse, hunger, imprisonment, we are seeing it all.

It makes me think of the question in the baptismal liturgy: “Do you renounce the evil powers of this world which corrupt and destroy the creatures of God?”

As it seems the world is falling apart, looking at our world, looking at our lives we may ask: “does it have to be like this?”

Even something simple like the unprecedented thousands who came into Los Olivos for the Christmas tree lighting, Gingerbread Wonderland and the Mattei’s Tavern open house last evening struck many I spoke to as people reaching out for something other than the darkness of our world, the slog through the somber, distressing news, for an engagement of social reality that is positive and hopeful and real today....

So along with “does it have to be like this?” we may also ask “what are we going to do?”

As you see written in the Roar and in other resources, this season of Advent comes to us as “darkness in the northern hemisphere literally descends earlier and earlier until the arrival of Winter Solstice and Christmas day.” The themes of this season are much larger than preparing or awaiting the simple fact of Christmas, but give voice to our yearning for the whole world to be full of the totality of God, all compassion, all healing,

all restoration in undying love and in real ways.

Our work on a community kitchen for the Santa Ynez Valley here at St. Mark’s is an example: we want hungry people to actually eat.

And so it is worth recognizing in this gospel reading and in our prayers and hearts that our focus is not “the end times” or Jesus coming again at the end of the age, but Christ coming again and again and again, God’s daily visitation, God’s continual presence in our lives and in the life of the world now.

The examples Jesus uses of the fig tree, the man going on the journey, and his ultimate admonition to “Keep awake” are for the present, are for the way we live in the faith community, and in the wider world, and in our daily lives all the time.

Today, now, always, if we are awake (at least some of the time), we will see and *be* the living agents of God entering the world repeatedly in the same way Jesus entered the world at Christmas, in the midst of actual lives, in unexpected ways, at the margins, vulnerably, tangibly.

And so: the reign of God begins now in human acts of love and kindness, justice, and in non-violent resistance to all that opposes the dignity of every human being and the integrity of creation.

We proclaim in word and, most importantly, in deed a different way of seeing God in our midst.

And recalling that Jesus came into the world as it was that sacred night: in turmoil, in poverty, in the midst of violence, in social upheaval, as a refugee, exposed to all that people have always and are still today experiencing as threats.

So God doesn't come to us primarily as who we want to be, or think we should be, or are trying to be but as we really are.

And so the human experience of God in Jesus included and continues to include rejection, betrayal, abuse, and violent death in poverty.

And then, as now, resurrection, restoration, new possibilities, new realities arising where there seemed to be none. Nothing the same again, including the present and the actual experiences we encounter day by day.

We awaken to having new eyes, to seeing differently.

Let me remind you of something from Fr. Richard Rohr and his new book *Just This* that I offered you last week. He writes: "*How we see will largely determine what we see and whether it can give us joy or make us pull back with an emotionally stingy and resistant response. Without*

denying an objective outer reality, *what we are able to see, and are predisposed to see, in the outer world is a mirror of our own inner world and state of consciousness at that time.* Most of the time, we just do not see at all, but rather operate on cruise control."

In this gospel reading today, in this Advent season, the message is: Jesus wants us off of cruise control and fully awake.

We'll have to take some actual time to ourselves, to filling what Fr. Richard calls our "reservoir," the inner lives we all have.

I also ran across Fr. Richard writing about vulnerability, reflecting on the way in which Jesus came into the world vulnerable to everyone and everything, the same as us. Fr. Richard writes: "To be present to something is to allow the moment, the person, the idea, or the situation to influence us and even change us. Our word for that is vulnerability. Could that be why we are afraid of such a stance? We give the event control over us, and none of us like that."

So we can imagine God's experience in Jesus influenced and continues to influence and change the heart of God... God's heart, our hearts, God in our hearts continuing to be vulnerable as we live and act in our real lives, in our

real world, in the worlds within our world that we each and all inhabit.

Advent is now. It is present tense.

Now we experience our world, our lives. We ask “does it have to be like this?” We ask “what are we going to do?” And we have the entire presence of God with us and in us to respond in ways that

are persistent in love that does not know death, in building up, in creating change that restores lives and life generally to our planet, to our human societies and cultures, among our families, friends, acquaintances, the strangers we encounter – change that reveals God’s reign today and that will ultimately be all and in all.



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www.smitv.org