

12/03/23  
Arriving Adventually  
Mark 13:24-37

As has been noted, today we begin the Advent Season. We are not yet in the Christmas Season. That will come in four weeks. The wisdom of the Church in setting up the Church calendar says, there is a unique time, between Ordinary time and Christmas time. We are in that unique time, today. It's the season that says eventually Christmas will come. Or, as we are saying at Potomac Presbyterian Church, *Adventually* the one who is to come will arrive. I wonder if we can't claim these four weeks for renewal for ourselves and for the world. Claim this time as a period of waiting in community, staying alert in community, preparing in community, and allowing ourselves to not be all-consumed by the pressing busyness of the season.

We are naming and recognizing with intent and thought that Christmas arrives eventually or *adventually*. You and I can't help but to begin our preparations for Christmas and that's appropriate. Thursday, we had a great group here decorating the church to help it sparkle. Thank you, Jan Cookerly and your dedicated team—the Hougens, Janet Dunlop, Bob Stow, Wendy Petti, Marcia Boogaard, Pastor Chris, and I know there are others I'm forgetting. The church looks gorgeous.

There was a fantastic group of Deacons here yesterday preparing and decorating for the Williamsburg Breakfast so that we could gather in community to mark the beginning of this glorious season. Thank you, Deacon Moderator, Penny Boyd for leading that effort and thank you, all of the Deacons for your time, care, and dedication you put in to

making the Williamsburg Breakfast so festive, fun, delightful, and delicious. Decorating, gathering, sharing a meal, entering into the celebrations in community are all vital aspects of Advent.

Advent looks forward to Christmas, but Advent is also a time that's uniquely set aside for us to look forward to the other coming of Jesus, namely Jesus' coming at the end of all time, his coming in glory and in judgment. We are reminded of this meaning of Advent in today's scripture passage from the Gospel of Mark that Dave read. This passage is the traditional 1<sup>st</sup> Sunday of Advent reading and I think one reason for it being so, is because it reminds us to look beyond the birth of Christ on Christmas to Jesus' second coming. Our attention is drawn to the end of time, to the dismantling of the cosmos, and to the fulfillment of all God's purposes for creation issuing in a new heaven and a new earth.

Advent gives those who wonder about end times a whole season, one that lasts 4 weeks, to think on the end of time and to think on Jesus who will be there when that end arrives. In today's Gospel reading, Jesus promises that time is moving toward the arrival of the Son of Man who will gather all the people together and make all things right.

I've heard some say that Christians are divided between those who await expectantly the return of the Son of Man and Christians who ignore this aspect of Jesus' teaching altogether. Many of us are embarrassed by people who focus on the end times. Or, by those who claim that the world will end in such and such a way. Nevertheless, the Season of Advent says we need to take Jesus' words in Mark 13 seriously. In Mark 13

Jesus promises that God has prepared something wonderful beyond our world and time and it's necessary for the community to remain attentive to that promise. Advent is a time when we reaffirm our belief in a God who will redeem the entire world.

The prospect of Christ coming again to set our world right once and for all, may fill us with dread or rather, perhaps with **hope**. In his book, The Joyful Christian, theologian and author C.S. Lewis writes about hope. I've shared this quote with you before. It reminds us of what is central in this season and also to what's at the foundation of our faith. Lewis writes,

Hope is one of the Theological virtues. This means that a continual looking forward to the eternal world is not (as some people think) a form of escapism or wishful thinking, but one of the things a Christian is meant to do. It does not mean that we are to leave the present world as it is. If you read history, you will find that the Christians who did most for the present world were just those who thought most of the next . . . It is since Christians have largely ceased to think of the other world that they have become so ineffective in this. Aim at Heaven and you will get Earth thrown in aim at Earth and you will get neither.<sup>1</sup>

To the church and to all the faithful everywhere our passage for today is both encouraging and demanding. Believers are not robbed of their expectation of a final day, a day of relief and vindication. That time will come, but it will be at God's determination and accompanied by signs God will give. All human calculations for when this time will be or how this day will come about are pointless.

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<sup>1</sup> C.S. Lewis. The Joyful Christian. (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1977), p. 138

Our Lord promises the world the great joy of redemption but doesn't say exactly when it will happen. And so, we wonder, when, how, in what way? Advent is a good time to wonder and remain alert. There are some who think that the end time is a code to be cracked. I don't see that interpretation anywhere in today's reading. We are told in the Gospel, that we don't know the when, or the why, or the how, we know only that we are expected to be ready when Christ comes again. What does that mean—to be ready?

Advent's a good time to think on that—in fact, it's a season set aside to do just that: to think on what it means to be ready. Advent's a good time to get prepared for both arrivals of Christ, for Christmas and for the one beyond Christmas. Some folks put it this way, **“We are to stay ready so that we don't have to get ready.”**<sup>2</sup>

I heard a story about the British explorer Sir Ernest Shackleton while he was on a South Pole expedition. Shackleton left a few men on Elephant Island, promising that he would return. Later, when he tried to go back, huge icebergs blocked the passage. But suddenly, as if by a miracle, an avenue opened in the ice, and Shackleton was able to get through. His men, ready and waiting, quickly scrambled aboard. No sooner had the ship cleared the island, than the ice crashed together behind them. Recognizing their narrow escape, the explorer Shackleton said to those newly aboard, “It was fortunate you were all packed and ready to go!” They replied, “We never gave up hope. Whenever the sea was clear of ice, we rolled up our sleeping bags and reminded each other, they may come today.”

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<sup>2</sup> Timothy L. Adkins-Jones, “Commentary on Mark 13:24-37.” Workingpreacher.org, 12/3/23

Our passage in Mark says, “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. . . . And what I say to you I say to all: Keep awake.”

Here at the church, we are engaging actively this season of preparation, of remaining alert, of sharing in wonder, and of keeping awake. Do plan to join our community’s events and invite others as well. If you attended the Williamsburg Breakfast you heard about many of the ways we’re inviting one another and all people to engage this unique season. All are invited to all of the preparations.

Next Sunday, Dec. 10 at 3pm is a Community Christmas Concert. We will listen to the sounds of the season and take time for communal singing outside of worship. When do we do that anymore? When do we sing in community with others? Taylor Swift? Beyonce? They’re onto something! Invite someone to join you next Sunday who may need to know the comfort of singing in community.

Saturday, Dec. 16 from 4-7pm is an Advent or Christmas Quiet Day. This is in participation with the Potomac Area Churches Christmas open houses. We know this is a busy time of year for us all, so instead of adding one more activity, plan to stop by the church to pray, or be prayed for, to sit in silence, or to listen to music, to sip hot cider, and wonder.

Sunday, Dec. 17 at 11am the children will lead our service of worship. The children's Christmas pageant is entitled, "WOW! A Nativity Play" and you will find your heart warmed by the hope, joy, and wonder of children.

Sundays, Dec. 10 & 17 at 9:45am Professor John Yieh will teach about the wisdom tradition in the Old and New Testaments. Professor Yieh is a favorite of this congregation and he's going on Sabbatical next year so we were able to snag him for only these 2 Sundays to learn from him and think about wisdom.

Thursday, Dec. 21 at 7pm we will worship on the longest night of the year. Many in our community have lost loved ones, are grieving, are sad, are lonely, are needing to bear witness to light in deep darkness. We will do that in community here during the Longest Night worship service.

In Mark 13, "In Jesus' final mini parable, he gives the example of servants working together to take care of someone's household. Everyone has their job, including the doorkeeper whose job is to watch the door. The reason the household can be ready for the master's return is because everyone is working together, with their own jobs in community, and together they can stay alert. . . . We can remain alert when we are in community, preparing in community, watching in community, and discerning in community as well."<sup>3</sup>

We begin Advent by looking ahead to the final act of love from our Creator, when all things will be made new. Before we rejoice in the birth of Jesus on Christmas, we are

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid

asked to contemplate the Second Coming of our Creator in the person of Jesus and to prepare for that arriving *adventually*.

Let our Advent preparations begin as they will end, in joy and in community, as we celebrate the joyful feast of the people of God, and do this, in community. [**Point to Communion Table**]

Come Now, O Prince of Peace, make us one body. Come, O Lord Jesus, reconcile all people.

Let us stand and sing together the first 2 verses of hymn #103 Come Now O Prince of Peace.

Amen