

1 Advent, Year B, RCL
The Rev. Catherine L. Tatem
The Church of the Redeemer, Greenville, SC
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Isaiah 64:1-9

Psalm 80:1-7, 17-19

1 Cor 1:3-9

Mark 13:24-37

O that you would tear open the heavens and come down, so that the mountains would quake at your presence—

This is how Isaiah waited for the suffering to end – with fervent remembering of God’s mighty acts and presence, with recognition of the people’s transgressions, our sins, and with a plea to be remembered: “Do consider: we are your people.”

Welcome to Advent at a time when our own longing for normalcy is not yet fulfilled. The words of Isaiah teach us how to wait: with remembering God, owning up to our sins, with claiming the fact that we are God’s people, waiting for our Savior to come, and to come back. This is the work and nature of Advent. We wait for baby Jesus, powerful Jesus, loving Jesus, our Savior.

But after that suffering, Mark reminds us, “the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light,

²⁵and the stars will be falling from heaven,

and the powers in the heavens will be shaken.

²⁶Then they will see ‘the Son of Man coming in clouds’ with great power and glory. ²⁷Then he will send out the angels, and gather....”

Now, we wait. We do not wait as in the time of Isaiah ... we know that know that Christmas day will come, that there will be a baby named Jesus in a manger who will change the world. We still have our laments: this world is new, and we’re weary. Give yourselves the time to mourn the losses of this year, and the losses that will continue. And then, my friends, rejoice! Because the darkness will not last and we know that! Now, live it. Remember that creativity that comes out of adverse times: there is always song, from African American spirituals – a better world is coming, to another entire genre of music out of the death camps of WWII. God will not be suppressed. Who will show the world that Jesus does, in fact, live?

We will! We can take our message to our friends, family, and neighbors right from Paul’s letter to the Corinthians:

³Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. ⁴I give thanks to my God always for you because of the grace of God that has been given you in Christ Jesus,”

I give thanks to God for you. I give thanks to God. We wait. Remember. Anticipate. Because we know the time is coming that everything that we have – joys and sorrows – will go away. One thing remains. Jesus, who says: “³¹Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.”

That, my friends, is the message of hope in Advent. The Word, Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit, God ... does not pass away. We are not in Christmas yet; we are waiting, longing, imploring God to break into our world again. And again. We who are suffering need God. We who are healing need God. We who are sad, busy, discouraged, doubting, and yes, happy, need God.

Our waiting time is this season of Advent.

As we make choices in the coming days of how we will spend our time, with whom we will spend our time, and in what ways we will prepare ourselves – body, mind, and spirit – for Jesus, recall that precious moment of waiting. Awaken the longing in your soul, and, in the words of Mark,

“Keep awake.” We do not want to miss that miraculous moment when Jesus arrives, once again, in the world. Keep awake.

We have the opportunity, in Advent time, to keep watch in a way that the world does not; to mark time by that which is holy, by that which is immersed in God and not in our whims.

I invite you to a holy Advent. I invite you to practice being Christian. Today is our new year, our fresh start, our time of resolutions and of turning not completely to the world, but to God. Practice. Light a candle ... each day ... pray ... by yourself, as a family, as the family of God that we are, that we might fully welcome Christ every day.

Here is one of my favorite descriptions of Advent, from Frederick Buechner in his book, “Doubters dictionary:”

“The house lights go off and the footlights come on. Even the chattiest stop chattering as they wait in darkness for the curtain to rise. In the orchestra pit, the

violin bows are poised. The conductor has raised his baton. In the silence of a midwinter dusk, there is far off in the deeps of it somewhere a sound so faint that for all you can tell it may be only the sound of the silence itself. You hold your breath to listen. You walk up the steps to the front door. The empty windows at either side of it tell you nothing, or almost nothing. For a second you catch a whiff of some fragrance that reminds you of a place you've never been and a time you have no words for. You are aware of the beating of your heart...The extraordinary thing that is about to happen is matched only by the extraordinary moment just before it happens. Advent is the name of that moment." — [Frederick Buechner](#), *Whistling in the Dark: A Doubter's Dictionary*, pp 2-3.