

## THE WAITING IS THE HARDEST PART

This morning, just a bit before 7, as I was finishing up a cup of coffee and preparing to head up to the church, the power went out at our home. Not just a flicker, not a couple minutes before things came back on, but out and staying out. “You’ve got be kidding” I grumbled. As I went out to drive up to the church to see if there was power there I pulled the manual release on the garage door and lifted the door up. “I am so sick of all of this,” I thought. Sick of things not going according to plan; sick of unexpected inconveniences; sick of the stupid pandemic; sick of having to alter traditions and adjust things to fit a COVID world; sick of not being able to see people face to face; sick of computers and Zoom and leading worship in an essentially empty Meeting House; sick of the whole shebang! Well, that’s a fine way to enter into Advent.

I always feel like we stumble into Advent with the first Sunday’s readings seemingly disconnected from the season we are entering. Who wants to hear the apocalyptic Gospel lesson that shows up every year on this first Sunday of Advent? Mark’s version, assigned for this year, begins:

But 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.

Perhaps we shouldn’t be all that surprised in the Markan lectionary year – after all, this is the Gospel that has no birth story for Jesus.

Looking at the passage from Isaiah might seem more hopeful, but we don’t find “comfort, comfort, o my people” here. No, we find a plea and a cry:

O that you would tear open the heavens and come down,  
so that the mountains would quake at your presence—  
as when fire kindles brushwood  
and the fire causes water to boil—

If we were hoping for something more directly comforting, we’ll have to wait a week or so.

Waiting – I don’t know about you but that may be the last thing I think I need right now. Haven’t we waited enough already? Waiting is hard, no matter what we may be waiting for: an end to the pandemic, a return to something even close to “normal.” Waiting — for an end to racial injustice, economic equity, a Presidential transition. Waiting — for family celebrations and gatherings weddings, baptisms, birthday parties, memorial services. Waiting to return to work, the classroom, the athletic field. Waiting for birth – new birth, re-birth. Waiting for God to show up.

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

The prophet Isaiah and the people he was addressing knew all about waiting. This morning’s text was written around the time the first people came back to Jerusalem after years in exile. You can imagine that many of those returning were the children of those who left their homeland decades before. They probably grew up hearing stories of Judah and how wonderful it would be to restore the capital city to its former glory. The children traveled to this place, hoping that what their parents said would be true. When they arrived, their hearts sank. Jerusalem was destroyed, and it would be a long time before it was restored—if it happened at all. It’s at this point, when the people feel miles away from God, that the writer of this passage asks to meet God—not for proof of God’s existence, but because life is a mess and they need God, they desire God. Sound familiar? Disciples of Christ pastor, Dennis Sanders reminds us:

Advent is a time of expectation, of waiting for the coming of Jesus. We live in a time of uncertainty, where we are not sure of...well, anything. We want God to cut through the haze and make God’s self known.

During Advent, the cry of Isaiah should be our cry: God, come and shape us, shape our community. Like Jerusalem, our world is a mess. Things are not well. We wait for God to come and shake things up and change us for the better.

I think what is particularly striking about Isaiah’s words is that his poignant and emotional pleas to God for forgiveness and a renewed presence while lamenting God’s absence are grounded in an unwavering knowledge that God remains present, even if seemingly unseen and unheard. Implicit in Isaiah’s words is an ongoing relationship with God. More often than not, especially these days, we may feel as though the God in whom we believe is a God who hides from us, a God whose presence is more elusive than we’d like. With Isaiah we cry to God, “Don’t just stand there silently, God. Do something!” For too long we’ve experiencing the chorus of Bob Dylan’s “Knock, knock, knocking on heaven’s door,” with no one answering, begging God to come down, to enter the public squares of life.

Perhaps we are looking in the wrong places. G. K. Chesterton said,

“God came down and slipped in the back door . . . to surprise us from behind, from the hidden and personal parts of our being . . . as if we found something at the back of our own hearts that betrayed us into good.”

Advent has a way of sneaking up on us, catching us unawares as we clamor for a more direct revelation of God. In the midst of our waiting, our frustration, our impatience, our longing, our tears, God steps into our world in unexpected ways, refashioning us even as we wait. “...we are the clay and you are our potter; we are all the work of your hand.” Yes, God, come down – but more importantly, open us to your re-creation already unfolding in our midst. Give us eyes not only to see you but where we have missed the mark, fallen short, betrayed your good creation,

violated your children – our brothers and sisters. In this season of Advent, awaken us to the reality that we all remain your children. Stir us up to see new possibilities for the fulfillment of your will and realm, even as we wait.

AMEN.