

The Rev. Dr. David K. McIntosh
November 29, 2020- The 1st Sunday of Advent (B)
Given at St. Mark's Church, Bridgewater, CT

Isaiah 64: 1-9; Psalm 80.1-7, 16-18; 1 Corinthians 1.3-9; Mark 13.24-37

“You meet those who gladly do right, those who remember you in your ways.” †

Today marks the beginning of a new year in our Church, the beginning of something new. Advent is supposed to be a season of watching, of expectation, of spiritual renewal and prayer. Watching for Christ's return... for Christ's coming at Christmas... for Christ's second coming. Or is it? Often, when I look around me, I'm struck by how many people are tired and afraid. The COVID pandemic is something that has drained us all, as had the economic and political mess in our nation. And yet, everyone seems to be in a rush to do things, to buy things for Christmas, to try to make everything the way it used to be. There seems little time to pray and ponder what it is we are actually preparing for.

“After that suffering... they will see ‘the Son of Man coming in a cloud’ with power and great glory!” “Beware, keep alert; for you do not know when the time will come” (Mk 13.35). The author of our Gospel today provides an ominous image, with ‘stars falling from heaven’ and powers shaken. Consider also the words from the great prophet Isaiah, “Tear open the heavens and come down’... so that ‘fire kindles brushwood... and causes water to boil” (Isa 64.1-2). As I prayed over these passages this week, my mind was filled with images from this past year—of the social malevolence and violence that is affecting our nation and our world, at a time when we should be coming together... of the devastating fires in California and the unbelievable number of massive hurricanes in the Gulf this year, all of which destroyed so much property and so many lives... of this unrelenting pandemic and our ongoing efforts to cope with it, and of those who have suffered in hospitals and at home. All reminders, as are Isaiah's words, that WE ARE NOT in control! And still, there is hope: ‘We are the clay, and you are our potter; we are all the work of your hand... do not remember our iniquity forever... consider we are all your people’ (Isa 64.8). In many ways, Advent is a call to all of us to ‘let go.’

Despite the secular world's call to shop ‘till you drop, the true message of getting ready and being ‘alert’ doesn't involve our efforts to make things happen... it's about letting go and letting God take over! As I mentioned, Advent marks the beginning of our liturgical year, when everything starts anew—a new cycle of different scripture readings, a new cycle of prayer. It's a dedicated time for us to work on our relationship with God, and with each other... to reflect on how those relationships have gone awry. Yes, we've all known injury and pain, and we've all caused others to feel hurt, even when we did not mean to do so. Advent is a chance to let go and be who God created us to be. Advent helps us to remember that Jesus our ‘King’ was not born into great wealth and power, in a palace... He came into our world and dwelled among us, as one who was lowly and unknown. We are called to remember that!

Indeed, at every Eucharist even if, for now, we cannot receive the physical bread and wine, we are called to ‘remember.’ The prayers and actions we do together, we do at Jesus' command:

'Do this for the remembrance of me.' To remember is more than recollection; it comes from Old French and Old English words which mean 'to make whole again.' A member is a part of a body, a part of the whole... when we **'re-member'** together, we re-make Christ's Body. We make whole again, Christ among us.

When we 're-member'... we recall that Christ was born a frail infant, surrounded by animals of burden and people who were outcasts and marginalized by society. And in doing so, we remember all of those we have ever loved, past and present. Whenever we 're-member,' we think of that Christ who humbly gave himself for us, who suffered and died on a Cross for us. We 're-member' the One who came to live among us in great humility, and the One who will come back to us in great majesty. Advent is a time of watching and remembering... and the remembering is so important! Remember the same way the disciples did, even after they thought they had lost Jesus forever.

I wonder... when 'the Son of Man,' finally comes in clouds with great power and glory, what will he find?

The prophet warns us, to forget God and get immersed in temporal/ worldly things is foolish... Only the truly wise live with expectation, through joyful memory. Remember that every talent and gift we possess comes from God! 'You have been enriched in him, in speech and knowledge of every kind.'

There were days this week I felt unappreciated. I work very hard as both a physician and a priest, and often I don't even want to get out of bed to help people who seem ungrateful for my efforts... people who perhaps deserve what their getting by their own fault and actions. But giving into that feeling is not what living is about... that's not embracing my gifts and being who God calls me to be. Again, it's not about me (or us), it's about God.

Isaiah prophesied, "You meet those who gladly do right, those who *remember your ways*" (Isa 64.5). And what might God find upon meeting us? Jesus was clear about the expectations: Care for God's creation; seek justice; care for the least among you; Love one another, as I have loved you. It's about letting go, and letting God take over! 'Watch and keep awake' (Mk 13). Remember God's ways... Watch for the *new things* God is doing.

Christ is in each one of us, as we gather together in prayer. Christ is present in our actions whenever we help others who need our help. Christ is present in ways that defy explanation, in strangers that become close companions. Christ is present wherever and whenever we remember and follow God's ways. Advent...

It's about letting go and seeing the new things *God is doing*. Be alert, that your hearts won't be weighed down by the worries of this life. Keep alert, for He is coming!

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