

Year B Advent 1 Mark 13, 24to 37

Happy New Year! Today is the first day of a new Christian year for us – it is the first day of Advent. Advent always begins four Sundays before Christmas Eve and it is a season of waiting and hope and expectation. So what are we waiting for?

With all the hype – Christmas music in the malls, Christmas commercials on the t.v., Christmas decor, goodies, and gifts in every store in town – it may seem like we're waiting for Christmas. But we are not. We are not waiting for the birth of Jesus, our Saviour – that already happened. We will mark the anniversary of his birth with joy and celebration though because something very special happened the day that Jesus was born. God came to earth. God was made flesh and lived among us. That little baby who was fully human and fully God, became the one who died for our sins and brought God's kingdom here to us on earth.

And so, during Advent, even though Christmas is really exciting because of the presents and family time and love flowing freely and it marks the day our Saviour entered the world, we look forward – beyond Christmas – to something even more exciting...We mark the day Jesus first came into the world because we know that will lead to the second day he comes into the world...the day Jesus comes in his glory to finish what he started – to bring God's kingdom fully here on earth.

We know that will happen – God promised and he does not break promises – but we don't know when. In today's story Jesus is saying to his disciples that they won't know if the master will come in the evening, at midnight, at cockcrow, or at dawn. And he says this to them right before the events of his death take place...In the evening he shares his last meal with his disciples and tells them the bread and wine are his body and blood – to remember him every time they eat and drink until he comes again...In the middle of the night, Jesus is praying in the garden of Gethsemane shortly before Judas arrives with the authorities to arrest him...Peter follows Jesus and his captors to Pilate's palace and, at cockcrow, Peter saves his own skin by denying that he knows Jesus...Most importantly, it is at

dawn on the third day after his crucifixion that the women arrive at Jesus' tomb and find it empty.

It is not a coincidence that the times Jesus lists – evening, midnight, cockcrow, and dawn – mirror the major events of his death and resurrection. Jesus is reassuring his disciples that what he says will happen. When Jesus died, the sun was darkened and the earth shook – the temple curtain was torn in two not only to signify the Father grieving the death of his Son but, also, to signify the tearing down of the barrier between God and us. And when Jesus rose again at dawn on the third day, he was the first-fruits (the first one) to be resurrected in the new age of God's kingdom. Jesus brought God's kingdom to us. Advent is the time when we reflect and remember our sure and certain hope that, even though Jesus is not physically with us now, he is still with us and he will physically come again to complete the work of fully bringing the kingdom.

So we wait and waiting can be hard. It reminds me of the first words of Isaiah that we heard earlier... "O that you would tear open the heavens and come down, so that the mountains would quake at your presence". Words so full of passionate yearning for God to be right here with us, doing good things in the world. Sometimes I feel like that. We've been waiting for a long time and waiting is hard and sometimes waiting feels lonely.

But we're not alone. We are together getting strength and spiritual nourishment from the presence of God among us to keep our lights shining in this "oh, so ready to be fixed" broken world. We are not alone.

Look at your hands. We have done this exercise together before but it is worth reminding ourselves. Look at your hands and think of the Creator's hands, hands that made the world, potter's hands that formed our clay; think of Jesus' hands, hands that washed the feet of his disciples, hands that were nailed to the cross for us; think of the Spirit's hands, and realize they are the hands you are looking at right now.

Jesus tells us, "Anyone who loves me will obey my teaching. My Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them" (Jn.14:23). He sent the Holy Spirit to make his home with us, to dwell within us, connecting us with Father and Son. Our hands are the Spirit's hands.

So, yes, we're waiting but it isn't the relax on the couch, put your feet up sort of waiting. Our hands have got work to do...each with his work and with the doorkeeper at the watch. To do that work, Paul reminds us today that God has given us grace through Jesus Christ, we have been enriched in every way, strengthened, and not lacking any spiritual gift. We have been well-equipped so that our hands may do the work God calls us to do.

And our work is very important work. Different scholars put it different ways. Bishop Leslie Newbigen says that not only are we signs of God's kingdom and a foretaste of God's kingdom, we are also instruments – tools – for God's kingdom. Bishop Tom Wright says that heaven and earth are not very far from each other and at certain places they intersect and interlock. He says that Jesus was the ultimate point of intersection and we, because we have been baptized into his death and resurrection, we are intersection points for heaven and earth too. It reminds me of the song I have likely told you about that says, "God put a million, million doors on the earth for his love to walk through and one of those doors is you. With every act of love, we bring the kingdom."

That's exciting. However you want to say it – that we are intersection points for heaven and earth, doors for God's love, tools to build for his kingdom – it's exciting. Jewish mothers, praying for the Messiah, used to say to their children, "Every good deed that you do, brings the Messiah one step closer." And Peter writes in his second letter that we can hasten God's kingdom through our lives of godliness and holiness. That is exciting.

God's kingdom is here and someday, God's kingdom will be fully complete. Jesus will come to heal our world and God's kingdom will be on earth just like it is in

heaven. We don't know when but we know it will happen. That's what Advent reminds us that we are waiting for.

So, yes, we are waiting – we wait in a world that still has hunger, still has loneliness, still has violence, and injustice – yes, we are waiting...but our hands have work to do.