

## **Advent 1C 12/01/2024**

Advent is a season that is counter cultural. We can get busier and busier as we approach Christmas. Yet when we gather together for worship we talk and sing about slowing down and waiting. We sing those Advent hymns in minor keys, that some people don't like. We don't even sing a Hymn of Praise and instead we sing only a Kyrie.

The ceremony of the candle lighting is added in every Sunday service as well in our Christmas Eve services. This year we are using something new that I suggested. It is entitled – “God is Near”. This may be the message that we need to hear this Advent season.

In order to hear that God is near, we may have to stop and wait, to be alert and pray. No matter whether you think something good will come out of the craziness in our country or not, it can become loud. Hearing God may become more difficult.

The people that Luke was writing to were probably becoming confused as to what he was talking about also. Jesus said there will be signs in the sun, the moon, and the stars and on the earth distress among nations confused by the roaring of the seas and waves. The Son of Man will be coming in a cloud.

Now when these things take place, stand up and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near. I'm sure if we saw this we would raise our heads, and our mouths would be open. Whether Jesus comes this way or not, the point is he will return. This is our future hope.

He also said that heaven and earth may pass away, but his words will not pass away. Another word of hope. Jesus talks about the fig tree and the growing cycle. Things come and go. Sometimes things will be crazy and not make sense to us, but God in Jesus Christ isn't going anywhere. God always promises to be near.

Thankfully this is one part of history that does repeat itself. Thus, we know that this will not change and so we are challenged to be in the moment. Even for the people that Luke was writing to, Jesus had told them to be alert and pray for the strength to make it through their craziness. It is no different for us.

Advent is about paying attention so as not to get caught up in the craziness. Be alert, wait and pray for the strength to stay focused on Jesus. Our culture for the most part does not observe Advent. I believe at least if not before Halloween, we can begin to start finding Christmas things in stores.

Advent pulls in the reigns and reminds us that Jesus will return. Too often there are Christians who like to use the second coming to scare people to be a Christian their way. This is not what advent, and the second coming are about.

It is to remind us that Jesus has come and on one hand is still here and also will return physically again. Jesus may have confronted people when he was here, but his goal was never to scare them. He tried to teach what God expected, but people always had a choice. Just as we do.

Jesus was always teaching about how to live in community. During advent we might reflect on how we interact in the community with our neighbors. There are many scared and anxious people in our world today. What message do we hear and have that we can share with them?

How do we get ready to do this? While we wait our Psalmist today prays show me your ways, O God; teach me your paths! I wrote about this in my Pastor's Corner. Do we trust God enough to hear the answer and act on it?

We will not know what God wants us to do until we ask. In my experience, God loves each one of us as individuals, but then asks us to share that love in community, in different ways. I would dare say that the answer to our petition will have something to do with how we treat our neighbor. Even the ones we don't agree with.

After the Psalmist has asked God to show them the way and teach God's path, they ask God to remember how merciful God is and God's steadfast love is for all people. They ask God not to remember their prior sins, but to remember them according to God's goodness.

Could it be that Psalmist is thinking even though they are asking to know God's will, that they will probably have trouble with the answer? Thus, they are asking God to remember that they are not perfect, and that God has promised to love them and have mercy on them. Maybe we can relate?

Here is the key, I believe, the Psalmist prays, you lead the humble in what is right. It is only when our I bends enough that we are able to hear God's answer in our waiting. This is when we are ready to be taught.

The Psalmist finally comes to the conclusion that all of God's paths are steadfast love and faithfulness. We are able to see this as we keep our baptismal promise with God in Jesus Christ. In our waiting, it is only when we are able to release ourselves to God that we are able to hear and be taught how to love our neighbor.

Advent may be a penitential kind of season, but it doesn't lack hope for today and tomorrow. Hope for tomorrow is that even though things continue to turn and turn around, Jesus will return.

Our hope for today is that God's word will never pass away which means God is near. As we experience the craziness in life we are challenged not to get caught up in it, but to remain focused on Jesus. Be alert, wait and pray for wisdom with the Psalmist. This is what we are called to practice during this Advent season. This is counter cultural.

Even though we are challenged to be alert, to wait and pray to hear God's word, we are assured that we can wait in hope and that God is near. Waiting is not so bad when we know that we are not waiting in vain. We can have hope that God is near.

Let us pray, God of hope, we long for your word of hope in our lives. The craziness of our world and season get in the way of being able to hear your word of hope. We ask that your Spirit help us to be alert, to wait and pray that we may be able to hear your word of hope, that you are near. In Jesus name, Amen