

First Sunday of Advent – Nov. 30

Trinity Episcopal Church

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of all our hearts be acceptable in your sight O Lord, our strength and our redeemer. Amen.

Good Morning.

I love new beginnings and fresh starts.

The first day of school, New Year's Day, and Opening Day. Those days are filled with hope and promise and all kinds of wonderful expectations. When school begins the teacher doesn't really know you yet. You can sit in the back, it will be awhile before you are told to be quiet and to move up to the front. On the first of January, a new calendar year is just getting underway; the future is open, anything is possible. And on opening day, the Cubs are always tied for the lead in The National League.

It doesn't get any better than that.

Today is the First Sunday of Advent, the beginning of a new liturgical year.

And yet, except for the fact that our Gospel is from Luke rather than Mark, this lesson with its focus on the end of time, Christ's second coming, and the final judgment that is going to take place at the end of history, sounds a whole lot like the readings we heard in weeks leading up to the conclusion of the liturgical year and at the last Sunday of the year on our celebration of the feast of Christ the King.

Isn't this season of Advent supposed to be a four-week preparation for the coming of the Christ at Christmas? Aren't we preparing for the birth of Jesus? So why nothing about Joseph and Mary, and the innkeepers, and the shepherds? Where are the angels and the wise men (Actually, they are not in Luke's Gospel; but I'm trying to make a point and not concerned so much with proper biblical exegesis and exactness)?

Where are all the decorations? One might expect on this first Sunday of Advent, at least the beginning of a nativity scene going up, if not an early glimpse of the baby Jesus, then at least a manger and a few animals.

Instead the new church year begins by having us meditate on darkness, destruction and death! We begin with the end in mind: the end of life, the end of the world, the end of time itself!

We don't know when or how the world will end, but we have all heard stories about worlds ending. Worlds end on graduation day, when we enter a new relationship, or when someone makes the last out in the bottom of the ninth.

In every story, sin and failure, every broken promise, and severed relationship, every tale of loss and grief and disappointment, every time dreams are shattered or hopes are

dashed, a world comes to an end. Every day the world ends for someone and not only physical but also emotionally and spiritually.

Many times, when these stories are in the news and made public, they impact all of us and on many levels. We think of mass shootings and political assassinations; hurricanes and floods and fires. Sometimes these stories are private and personal and pondered only in the depths of our own hearts.

Today's Gospel story is about the end of all stories. "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 sea and the waves. People will faint from fear and foreboding of what is coming upon the world, for the powers of the heavens will be shaken."

But this is not the last word. The very next sentence tells us, "Then they will see 'the Son of Man coming in a cloud' with power and great glory." This is why angels proclaim and Jesus repeats so often: "Be not afraid." We have nothing to fear. It is precisely when things look the worst that we know they are about to get better. There has to be a Good Friday if we are going to have an Easter Sunday.

That's the point of the parable in today's lesson, "Look at the fig tree and all the trees; as soon as they sprout leaves you can see for yourselves and know that summer is already near. So also, when you see these things taking place, you know that the kingdom of God is near."

Just when things seem to be falling apart and it looks like they can't get much worse, we know, because we have read the whole Gospel, that they are about to get better.

The end, mine, yours, ours, the entire world's, is not a time to fall down or hang our heads in despair. It is as Jesus says, a time to stand up and raise our heads in expectation and hope, because it is the day our redemption is drawing near.

We begin with the end in mind, because on the first Sunday of Advent the Church insists that the Jesus who came at the first Christmas is also the one who will come in majesty at the end of the world. Christ is not just my personal savior, he is the long awaited Messiah who will bring God's purpose for creation to fulfillment. The Christ who comes at Christmas is the universal king of creation whom we celebrated last Sunday.

Advent is a season of watching and waiting: watching for the world to come but waiting in the world that is ending, watching for the coming light but waiting in the dark. Advent watching with a promise and waiting for its fulfillment

The good news of Advent is not simply that Christ is coming, but that his coming means we can hope, despite all that is falling apart in our lives, our communities, and the world around us.

Advent offers us expectation and hope for something new in spite of what we might hear on the nightly news or experience in our lives.

In Advent our spiritual work is not to prepare for the ending, but to get ready for our coming redemption, the coming of Christ and the Kingdom of God. We are to be alert and on guard and to stay watchful and awake. And we do that, as we are now, in prayer.

To help us in this effort, we will be adding a mid week Eucharist Service to our schedule and a couple of more opportunities for Morning and Evening Prayer during the week.

The expectation is not that everyone will come to all of these things, but that a few will come to some and that all will know, even if they can't make it to any, that we are here praying for them; and maybe just that thought alone will give them a chance to pause and pray for us so that together these days of Advent will be days filled with hope and promise and all kinds of wonderful expectations; and we will all grow together in our faith and celebrate Christ's coming. Christmas with an increased depth of meaning, purpose and love this year ... In the name of the Father....