

Sermon 3 December 2017  
Jeremiah 33:14-16; Mark 13:24-37

Advent is the season of waiting. Once again our children can lead us in the kind of waiting that shapes the imagination of the church during Advent. Turn the calendar from November to December and the children know what is coming at the end of the month. They know the familiar parts, the trees, the lights, the music, the special food, and the promise of brightly wrapped gifts. They start leaning into the days of December. At first the drumbeat is soft and slow, but as the days pass the cadence of expectation increases.

December is still *wonder*-filled for them. They wait, but there is nothing passive about their waiting; their waiting pulsates with anticipation. In these early, tender years waiting for Christmas and waiting for Christ are the same. It is all of a piece for the children.

Some of you came to the park after the parade last night and you saw our small cast of characters illuminated near the Christmas tree. If you lingered and watched our nativity you saw children walk slowly into the light of our circle to look in the manger, to see if there really was a baby there. Some of the parents had to encourage them a little, asking and telling them who that baby is, but as the child leaned over to see, something touched them. I won't presume to say what the little ones felt, but words like wonder and awe come to mind. There were many lovely things about our nativity last night, but the loveliest was the faces of the children as they looked in the manger.

For the children, waiting for Christmas and waiting for Christ is pretty much the same thing. That is not true for us—or it shouldn't be. Christmas comes every December 25<sup>th</sup>; count on it. If the planet survives another year, Christmas will be on Tuesday in 2018.

Waiting for Christ is different. The gospel stories are filled with vivid images of the promise of Jesus' second coming. Mark really gets graphic. In the days before that coming,

*the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light,  
and the stars will be falling from heaven,  
and the powers of heaven will be shaken.*

There are always self-styled seers and self-proclaimed prophets who want to map the days before the Savior returns, but the sacred writers are clear. *About that day or hour no one knows, neither the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father.* We have no calendar day to mark, we can't set aside a week before to get ready. That day comes swiftly, without a schedule in the Vail Daily's community calendar.

So what are we to do? How do we wait for Christ differently than we wait for Christmas?

Let's consider the stories of the second coming. I still look and lean forward to a day when God will gather the broken days of history and heal the heart of creation. I look and lean forward to the day of Christ's return to consummate the story of God's salvation. There is a tickle of anticipation in my heart; it works like a pacemaker to remind me that the narrative of worldly events we see is not the whole story. God is working, sometimes in the wide open, but mostly clandestinely, too much in the shadows to see—*except* with the eyes of faith. If we stay close to Jesus, we see.

We see Christ already comes over and over again—while the sun still shines and the moon still gives its light. We *see* him if we keep awake, and we expect to see. We see his coming in manifold ways—but usually we see him in the faces, the hands and the feet of those who seek to bring peace, kindness, mercy, healing, justice, truth, and love into the world.

In a short commentary, Christopher Hutson gave me a lot to think about. He said stories like the one we read from Mark this morning are *always available to be recycled and applied to new situations.* He writes that people like you and me can *look to understand God's mighty acts in the past as a framework for understanding how the people of God should respond to the present.\**

Hutson goes on.

*Amid the smoke of battle, the fog of politics,  
the confusion of economic distress,*

*the babble of would-be leaders wearing God masks and  
claiming divine authority,  
how shall we know which way to turn?  
The powers that be will lull us to sleep by reassuring us that  
they have our best interests at heart  
as they pursue their worldly agendas.  
They play to our fears, our prejudices, our self-interests, so we  
do not notice their demonic behaviors.  
Beware. Keep alert. Keep awake.  
The one who endures to the end will be saved.\**

That sounds too familiar.

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I believe Christ will return—and I believe Christ is with us. As Martin Copenhaver writes, we live one of the great paradoxes of the good news—we live our lives in-between, in the *already* and the *not yet* of the divine drama.

***Already** Jesus has established the means  
through which we are drawn into relationship with God,  
but **not yet** do we live in complete communion with God. **Already** the  
realm of God is evident,  
but **not yet** is that realm fully established.\**

Do you feel that way? We live a time of darkness and light—like every generation we live a time of darkness and light. Look around—the darkness is cruel, openly violent or secretly selfish—cruel darkness clawing at the beauty of the human soul and the disfiguring the grandeur of God’s creation.

Yet something powerful happened in the world when Jesus was born and lived, taught and touched, suffered and died, and was raised from the dead. Something extraordinary began in Bethlehem over 2,000 years ago. Each of us has been touched by the Word that became flesh in the stable that night, touched and changed forever—and now we live with the consequences of that touch.

We still wait for Christmas every year—but more importantly we wait for Christ. We wait with an active, outreaching faith. In faith we do

justice, love mercy, and walk humbly with our God. We live Jesus in the world. *And* we wait in the light of the promise that he is coming again.

\*Quotations from *Feasting on the Word, Year B, Volume 1*, First Sunday of Advent, Mark 13:24-37