

The Rev Frank F. Wilson
St. Timothy's Episcopal Church
Calhoun, Georgia
November 29, 2020

Advent 1, Year "B": Psalm 80:1-7; 16-18; 1Cor 1:3-9; Mark 13:24-37

Title: A Simple Sermon

There is the story about the young woman who had a date one night. And so, she got prepared, got dressed up, and was waiting on her suitor. Well, she waited and she waited. Imagine her disappointment and frustration when after an hour of waiting, her date had not shown up. Eventually, she came to the conclusion that she had been stood up. Oh well, she thought... so, she changed out of her clothes, put on her pajamas, got some snacks and settled into a night of TV. She had just gotten deep into a surprisingly good movie when the doorbell rang. Well, wouldn't you know, she opened the door and her handsome date was standing on the stoep. Staring at her with a look of shock and disbelief on his face he said, "I'm two hours late and you're still not ready?"

You may know that in the decades immediately following Jesus' death, many Christians believed that Christ's return would take place in their lifetime. And so maybe not unlike the woman waiting on her date, when they finally decided that the expected one is apparently not coming any time soon, the church sort of shifts gears and settles into a time of waiting.

The season of Advent is understood to represent, and in fact in the rhythm of the liturgical year, is meant to move us into a time of waiting. But as it turns out, exactly what we are waiting for is sort of a montage of understandings, theologies, and images.

We are, of course, symbolically waiting for the birth of Jesus. We are waiting for the arrival of the one whom the prophets have told us to expect.

We are waiting for messiah. We are waiting for the savior. We are waiting for Cosmic God, Creator God, Transcendent God, to come to us in a way that feels, and in fact is, intimate and close at hand. Come to us as a God that we can speak to and who can speak to us. Within the context of our liturgical season we are awaiting and anticipating the arrival of the Christ Child. Advent is for us a kind of remembering, an annual reenactment, a “let us hear this story again” kind of moment.

Familiarity with the Christian “story” is important to us as it is an access to how we are to understand and are in relationship with God, and thus in relationship with each other, and indeed in relationship with our planet and everything on it. And how we think and act today affects not only our own lives but generations to come.

All this being true, the season of Advent also alerts us to an event variously referred to as the Day of the Lord, Judgment Day, and the Second Coming – meaning the return of the Christ.

Both of these events, both Christ birth and his return, are dialed up, intended to be called to mind in this season of Advent. This is a season of waiting and, quite importantly, it is also a season of anticipation.

This season not only anticipates the birth of Christ, it anticipates all that Christ birth will mean – his ministry among us, his death, his resurrection, as well as his second coming. All of these things, all of these events are interrelated. Maybe not unlike a painting, the fullness of their meaning is only realized when viewed as a contextual whole. And all of these events are pointing towards the finale. They all contribute to and anticipate the coming of the Kingdom of God; sometimes referred to as the Peaceable Kingdom.

All of the events in the Great Story require and demand our attention. All are terribly important and worthy to be engaged and contemplated in their own rite - the birth of Christ, his ministry, his death, the resurrection, Easter. But it is the

potentiality to which they point that is the grand finale. It is this finale, this incredibly wonderful dream for humankind that really should excite us. That makes me sit up and take notice. That makes me embrace a kind of “YES!” to all that we hold to be true about and within the Christian journey.

I find a resonance with Biblical Scholar Marcus Borg on this point. Borg suggests (and he certainly is not alone in this view) that what Jesus is talking about in this passage from Mark is maybe not so much the end of the world as we know it, but rather it is more likely that Jesus is here referring to a transformation of the world order – a time when we, that is to say human kind, sort of “get it.” A time when the Old Testament prophet Amos spoke of as a time when justice will roll down like waters and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream (*Amos 5:24*).

A time when we treat each other and every human being with respect and dignity.

A time when justice is pure and not tainted by those who would pervert it for their own benefit or to their own ends.

A time when we -- not ‘we’ the residents of this town, not ‘we’ the residents of Georgia, not even the ‘we’ who are Americans, but we the residents of planet Earth practice what we preach living into the Gospel of love by whatever formal religious means gets us there.

A time when the whole world lives, acts, and behaves in a way that says and reflects the reality that we do in fact love our neighbor as ourselves and that we love and trust in God who created and loves us all. And when I say “trust in God” I mean trust in the God who says in a hundred different ways and thousands of times that love is the way. Ultimately, it is the only way that gets us to where we want and need to go.

That is an understanding of Advent that I get excited about. That is the thing that I can anticipate with great yearning. It is this potentiality, it is this prophesy, it is this anticipated God-breathed moment in time that keeps me going and gives me hope.

Well, by now you have probably discerned that I have but one sermon but a few hundred version of it. It is a simple sermon really. It is that God is Love. And being created in God's image and likeness, God very much desires that we embody that love and act and behave like it. Live life on that basis, on that principle, and you will be saved. Live life on that basis and in that understanding striving to be persons of love -- in our coming in and our going out, in our everyday, in all that we do..... then God is well pleased and we are then very much on the path that leads to a world that can rightfully be called the Kingdom of God. And even more amazingly when the whole world adapts the theology of love as it's raison d'etre we will be well on our way to having established the much-anticipated, wonderful, and blessed Peaceable Kingdom and I am so looking forward to it.

Amen.