

Advent Moments, Week 1 of “What It’s Really About-Unwrapping the True Meaning of Christmas”

Presented by Rev. Kristen Lowe on 12-03-2017 at Crossroads United Methodist Church, Waunakee, WI.

Scripture based on Isaiah 64:

We, like the prophets of old call out to you O God, that you would tear open the heavens and come down, so that the mountains would quake at your presence—

When you did awesome deeds that we did not expect,
you came down, the mountains quaked at your presence.

From ages past no one has heard,
no ear has perceived,

no eye has seen any God besides you,
who works for those who wait for him.

You meet those who gladly do right,
those who remember you in your ways.

Sadly, we have all become like one who is unclean,
and all our righteous deeds are like a filthy cloth.

We all fade like a leaf, and our iniquities, like the wind, take us away.

Yet, O LORD, you are our Father;
we are all the work of your hand.

we are all your people.

O that you would tear open the heavens and come down. For you, O Lord, we wait.



The Superintendent of the large Christian School was concerned about the disarray he found in so many of the classrooms he visited. Papers were often strewn on the floor and the Student's desks were surrounded by clutter. Feeling strongly that learning could not take place in such an untidy environment. He decided to take action. He chose one classroom for an experiment. He introduced himself to the students. And with a smile made this proposition: Your teacher, the principal and I provide a well-equipped classroom for you to enjoy. But we need your help in keeping your desks in the classroom orderly. Many of you have crumpled papers inside your desks, there are books left open and the pages are bent. Often there are pencils on the floor under your desks along with other debris. "I would like each of you to clean out your desk today. And begin the New Year resolving to keep it clean. One day. I will return and inspect your desks and the person with the cleanest desk will be given this \$100 bill. I

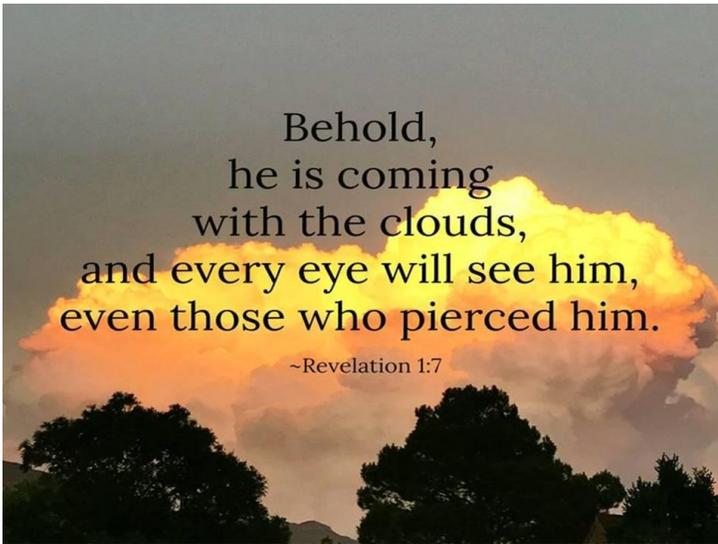
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will not tell you which day it will be. It will be a surprise. Not even your teacher or the principal will know the hour or the day”. The children squealed with excitement and began immediately pulling things from their desks. Filling the trash baskets with crumpled papers, stacking their books neatly inside their desks and neatly lining up their pencils and pens. Every morning for the first week, every student checked his or her desk to make sure it was in perfect condition, confident that today would be the day the superintendent returned. The next week, a few boys grew weary of the exercise and returned to their former habits. By the third week, several students remarked, “I doubt if he’ll come back at all. He just said that to make us keep our desk clean.” After two months, No one in the classroom bothered to inspect their desks and in fact, they forgot the superintendent’s promise. Except for one girl.



Dutifully, she inspected her desk every morning, and several times a day, making sure things were in proper order. For months she was teased by the other students. “He’s not coming back! Why do you keep looking for him? You look stupid believing that promise, anyway.” Still she remained quiet and kept her desk in perfect condition and waited. Near the end of the school year there was a knock on the door and the superintendent entered. Quickly, the students flung open their desks and began frantically to clean them. But the superintendent held up his hand for them to stop. All the students were asked to stand beside their desk while the superintendent inspected each desk. One after another, He rejected them for not being as he had instructed. One boy tried to give excuses but to no avail. Another blamed the teacher for not reminding them. Still another blamed the superintendent for making them wait so long. Finally, the superintendent arrived at the desk of the little girl who confidently displayed her well-kept desk while beaming at the superintendent. After inspecting her desk, he took her by the hand to the front of the classroom and awarded her the \$100 bill. “Boys and girls,” he said kindly, “This girl never stopped believing that I would return so she kept her desk in perfect order. She didn’t need to worry about what day or even what hour of the day I would arrive because she was always ready. Always.

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We are called to be ready, be awake, be alert, for our Lord is coming. So begins our entry into the season of Advent. Advent is not just a liturgical season of the church year. It's a reality of life and it happens in all sorts of ways. It comes at various points in life. Not just the four or five weeks Before Christmas.

Mark 13:21-24

But in those days, after that tribulation, **the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light**, and the stars will be falling from heaven, and the powers in the heavens will be shaken. And then they will see the Son of Man coming in clouds with great power and glory.

Scripture tells us that **"In those days the sun will be darkened the moon will not give its light and the stars will be falling from the heaven. And the powers in the heavens will be shaken."** These are Jesus words to his disciples. The disciples had been admiring the great temple and the large blocks of stone. They were impressed but Jesus tells them that change is coming. The Temple of their life is coming down.

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If you have ever experienced significant change in your life whether desired or dreaded you know about “those days.” You know about Advent. You know what it is like to enter the darkness of change. All change, whether welcome or unwanted, brings some kind of loss. It may be the loss of a relationship, the loss of a loved one, the loss of what is comfortable, familiar, and safe. Regardless of the loss, the world as we have known it has changed. It has ended.

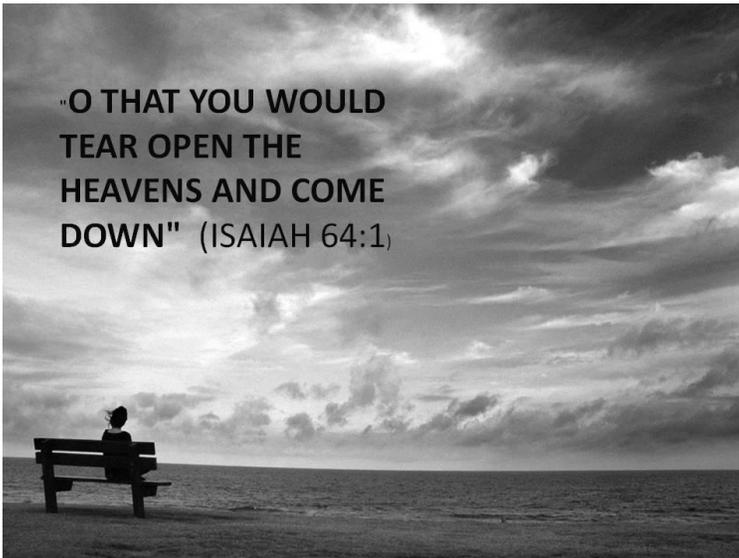


The Advents of our life bring important questions.

- How will we find our way forward when the usual lights that illumined our path no longer shine?
- What do we do when it feels as if our world is falling apart?
- Where do we go when it seems as if darkness is our only companion and God is nowhere to be found?

Beloved, the dark times of life are threshold moments the temptation is to do something, to fix it, to ease the pain, to escape the uncertainty, and to get back to what used to be. Beloved the God of Advent does not allow that. We can never go back to the way it was before the lights went out. **God does not undo our life. God redeems our life.** Advent is not so much about the losses as it is about the hope - the coming of what will be. That hope and coming is the Son of Man, Jesus, the Christ. The presence of Christ is the ultimate answer to every prayer, to every light extinguishing loss and to every advent of our life. **Christ is the answer.**

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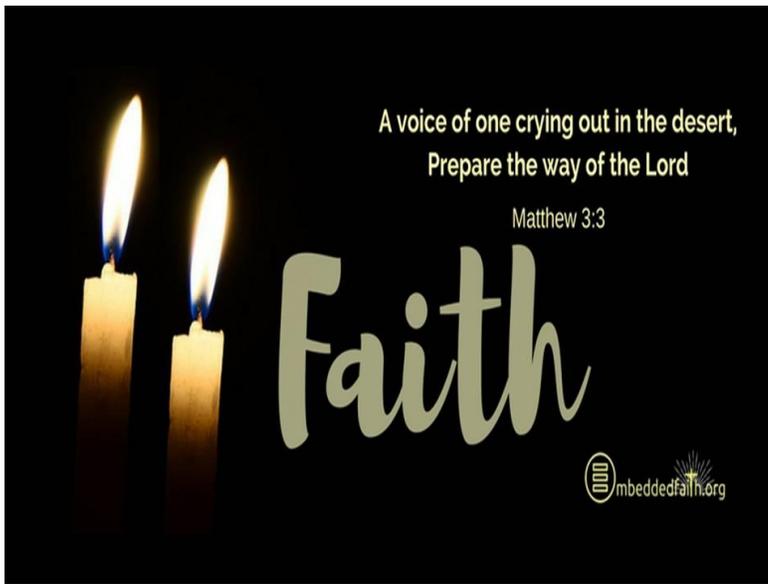


Every time we experience an Advent in our life we echo the prophet Isaiah’s cry: **“O that you would tear open the heavens and come down”** (Isaiah 64:1) And God does. God is faithful. God strengthens us to the end.

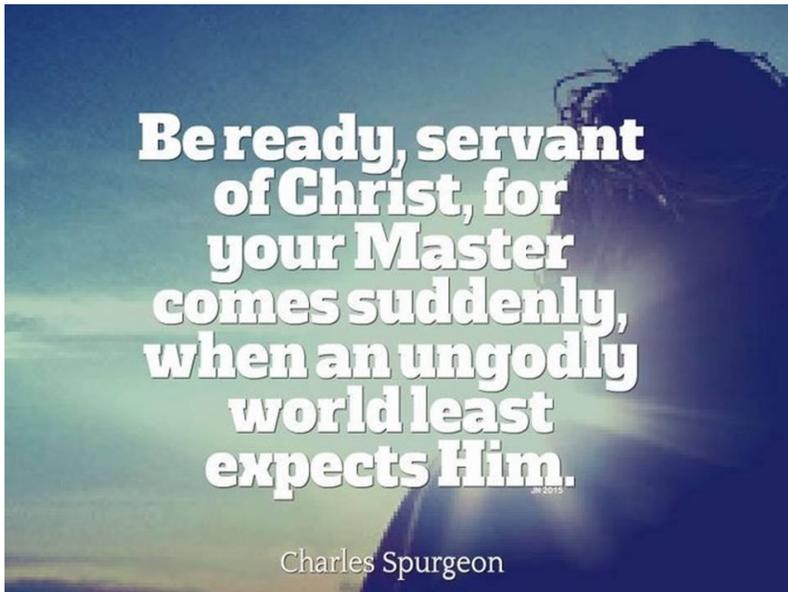
**“IN THE MIDST OF OUR LOSSES WE LACKED
NOTHING AS WE AWAIT THE REVEALING OF THE
LORD JESUS CHRIST.” (1 CORINTHIANS 1:7 -- 9)**

Paul shares with the believers gathered in Corinth these words of comfort: **“In the midst of our losses we lacked nothing as we await the revealing of the Lord Jesus Christ.”** (1 Corinthians 1:7 -- 9). The Advent times of life are times of waiting. They are in between times. They are transitional times. In Advent we live in between what was and what will be. We walk with ambiguity. We are neither here nor there. They are times of transition and it is hard sometimes, even impossible to see the way forward, but if we allow them to, the dark threshold places of life can draw us deeper into the divine mystery. These Advent places remind us that we just don’t know everything. We do not see all possibilities. We are not in charge.

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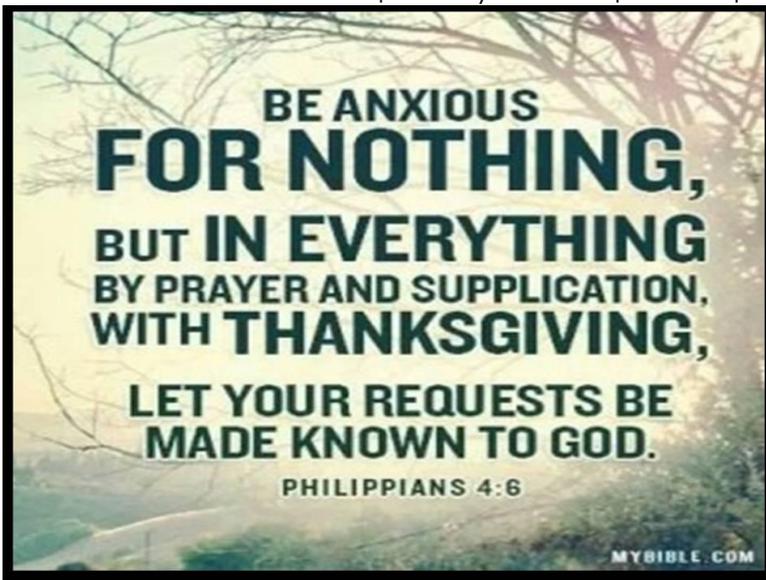
Advent challenges us to give up our usual sources of illumination, to let go of our habitual ways of knowing and to question our typical ways of seeing things. Advent invites us to receive the God who comes to us in the darkness of life. At some point in our lives, life changes, the lights go out. Christ's presence. Our healing and the working out of our salvation are always taking place in the dark and messy parts of life. We have not and never will be abandoned to the darkness.



"Be Alert," be Ready" Jesus warns. He commands us to "Keep awake." Darkness is not our enemy as much as is falling asleep. We fall asleep whenever fear controls our life. We fall asleep when hope gives way to despair, when busyness is equated with goodness, when entitlement replaces Thanksgiving. When we choose what is comfortable rather than that which is life-giving. Whenever we think our life is over and that darkness is our final reality that we have been abandoned or that loss and darkness are our only reality then we have fallen asleep. The danger in the darkness is that we do not give our eyes time to adjust. Night vision is not about the light around us but the light that is within us a light that can never be extinguished. Beloved be alert, keep awake. You are the light of the world. Be diligent at the watch and that is contrary to what most of the world believes and what our society rewards. We must be awake not just in spite of but because of the darkness. To show up and be present in the

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darkness of life is some of the hardest work we will ever do. Run from our darkness and we run from God. In the darkness of Advent we wait expectantly without specific expectations.



"Be anxious for nothing, but in everything, by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which passes all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds, through, Christ Jesus." Waiting in darkness, is an act of faithfulness and surrender and prayer to our Lord to the coming One. Our Lord promises that He will be there in those advent moments and that he will come. Amen.