

1st Sunday Advent B 11

November 27, 2011

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

“But in those days, after that suffering, 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.

These are not the texts one might expect to hear on this the first Sunday of Advent. But they are the texts for today; they are about the past, they are about the future and most importantly they are about who we are here and now.

Isaiah begins by looking at the past, remembering how God came and entered into lives of His people. Isaiah is facing a time of renewal, while at the same time despairing over the destruction the Israelites are finding as they are returning to Jerusalem. Having just returned from exile the people still feel separated from God, so on behalf of the people, the prophet calls upon God to ‘show Himself’. Isaiah remembers when God did awesome deeds *“When you did awesome deeds that we did not expect, you came down, the mountains quaked at your presence”*. Then Isaiah proclaims who the people are and their relationship they have with God. *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.* So now as the people of Israel wait for God’s return. Isaiah cries “Lord,

November 27, 2011

you are the potter we are the clay, now consider we are all your people”. Isaiah remembering the past looks toward the future,

The reading from the Gospel of Mark also looks toward the future. Jesus is teaching his disciples and answering their questions about the end times. Like many of His teachings they include what appears to be a straight forward answer as well as a parable. In the beginning of this chapter Jesus is telling of signs telling of warnings about what will happen in their future. Then there will come signs of the approaching apocalypse, using the words of the Old Testament prophets Isaiah and Daniel.

Jesus starts with all of nature playing a part and displaying the signs of the coming of the Son of Man, whom we know as Jesus Christ, himself. Then He moves to a specific sign all of them would know, that of the fig tree. The fig tree was one of the last of the local trees to show signs of life after its dormant season. It was the sign of the arrival of summer when the fig tree returns put forth its leaves. Jesus told his disciples in the same way there will be signs of the coming of the Second Advent. Yet no one knows the day or the hour except the Father.

Then Jesus turns as he so often does to telling a parable. “It is like a man going on a journey, when he leaves home and puts his slaves in charge, each with his work, and commands the doorkeeper to be on the watch. Therefore,

November 27, 2011

keep awake—for you do not know when the master of the house will come, in the evening, or at midnight, or at cockcrow, or at dawn, or else he may find you asleep when he comes suddenly.” He will come at an unexpected time.

I remember growing up when my siblings were left home alone when mom and dad would run into town. Leaving they would put my older brother in charge, then give us all something to do. Wash the dishes, feed the dogs, do our chores, take care of our animals, clean our room – but knowing they would be gone a couple hours we would many times wait until later to do the work choosing first to do what we wanted. There were also sometimes when we failed get our list finished or to get anything done at all. Those were the time when we were not watching; we had not taken ownership of our responsibilities. We were too busy play games or sitting down to watch one more TV show which only lead to getting involved with the next show. Then the next thing we knew was the car coming down the lane to the house and there we were sitting there with nothing done. We failed the test; we did not take the responsibility that was entrusted to us, and the responsibility we cried out for. But what did we do, we blamed them for coming home to soon, or for giving us too much to do. We blamed each other for not doing their part so that I was not responsible for my part.

Yet unlike my parents who gave us a time for their return, Christ did not. Only the Father knows the time. But we all have been called each to our own work in

our Fathers house. So what are your responsibilities as you await the arrival of the Second Advent? What has God called you to do in this time?

First of all we are called to “Keep awake”, we are encouraged to “keep watch”; because we do not know the time, the day, the hour of his coming. At the same time we need to be aware of the signs. Just like when I was growing up, we knew when our parents were about to arrive home. Living in the country we could see the car as it turned up the lane, we could see the dust rise up or the head lights at night. We could see the signs of their arrival. But we also knew the time to begin looking.

Christ has given us the signs but without the time. The signs are not for us to watch and predict when his arrival will happen. If we wait to begin only when the signs become apparent we will be caught sleeping with our responsibilities not completed. If we wait till we see “the Son of Man coming in the clouds” it will be too late. We will not be ready to meet him at the door to welcome him home.

There is a movie called “Mrs. Brown”. It is about Queen Victoria of England who after the death of your husband Albert went into a deep depression. Her advisors knew of her love to ride horses, so in an attempt to help her recover from her depression they sent for her horse to be brought to the country estate of Balmoral where she was staying. The pony was brought to the estate by its caretaker, John Brown. His instructions were to care for the pony and have it

November 27, 2011

ready to ride at anytime whenever the Queen should want to do so. So every day John would saddle the pony and bring it to the courtyard and stand there ready and waiting. Each day the Queen would walk by and see him standing at attention next to the pony waiting for her to come and ride. Finally one day the Queen getting tired of seeing him standing there sends someone out to tell him that she is not now and may never again be interested in riding. John Brown is unmoved responds “When her majesty does wish to ride, I shall be ready.”

John is not only keeping watch, but is about the responsibilities and his work. Just like John, we need to about our responsibilities and doing that which we are called to do in this world until Christ comes again in the Second Advent.

While Isaiah is recounting the past in remembering that which God has done and Mark tells of the future. Paul reminds us in the opening to 1st Corinthians what that means for us in the present time. *I give thanks to my God always for you because of the grace of God that has been given you in Christ Jesus, for in every way you have been enriched in him, in speech and knowledge of every kind—just as the testimony of Christ has been strengthened among you—so that you are not lacking in any spiritual gift as you wait for the revealing of our Lord Jesus Christ. He will also strengthen you to the end, so that you may be blameless on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. God is faithful; by him you were called into the fellowship of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.*

November 27, 2011

As we await the coming of the Second Advent, we are to be about the calling God has given us. And God has promised to give us all we need to fulfill these responsibilities as we wait for Christ to appear again. Jesus also gives us hints of signs to watch for and encourages us to keep alert as we wait the coming of the Son of Man. Yet for us on this side of the cross, we also know and understand that Christ is with us, the Spirit is guiding us and we are called to not sit passively waiting for the heavens to open and Christ to descend for us to begin our work.

Today the font is out front not only for the baptism of Teegan at the second service, but as a reminder we are all children of God, welcomed in the waters. Soon we will all be reminded as we hear the words spoken to Teegan as the lit candle is offered. 'Let your light so shine before others that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven.' These works are our response to the gifts each of us has received through the grace God has given us. We have been given responsibilities along with the knowledge and strength to complete them as we await the day of our Lord Jesus Christ.

So let us keep watch for the time is near. For we are not to be found sleeping, or idly waiting for the Second Advent, but we are to be about His calling? So what I say to you I say to all: "Keep Awake"

AMEN

T.G.B.T.G.

Pastor Michael