

Scripture:

Isaiah 64:1-9

Mark 13:24-37

“Watching, waiting and preparing.”

The Coming of God ----- by Ann Weems.

“Our God is the One who comes to us  
in a burning bush,  
in an angel’s song,  
in a newborn child.

Our God is the One who cannot be found  
locked in the church,  
not even in the sanctuary.

Our God will be where God will be  
with no constraints,  
no predictability.

Our God lives where our God lives,  
and destruction has no power  
and even death cannot stop the living.

Our God will be born where God will be born,  
but there is no place to look for the One who comes to us.

When God is ready  
God will come  
even to a godforsaken place  
like a stable in Bethlehem.

Watch ...  
for you know not when  
God comes.

Watch, that you might be found  
whenever  
wherever

God comes.”

I particularly like the ending -----

“Watch ...  
for you know not when  
God comes.”

Watch, that you might be found  
whenever  
wherever  
God comes.”

Just like in this poem ----- watching ---- is a key element in Marks’ gospel reading today.

And of course ---- watching --- along with --- waiting --- and preparing --- is a key theme --- as we journey through the season of Advent ---- the next four weeks leading up to Jesus’ birthday.

In Mark’s gospel today Jesus talks about a man leaving his home ----- and how those entrusted with caring for his home ought to remain vigilant and attentively wait for his return.

And part of what Jesus is referring to is the need for us --- as His disciples -- ----- to be vigilant and attentively wait for His arrival.

“At that time people will see the Son of Man coming in clouds with great power and glory.” ----- verse 26.

And then verses 32 and 33 --- “But about that day or hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. Be on guard! Be alert! You do not know when that time will come.”

And the last verse --- verse 37 --- “What I say to you, I say to everyone: ‘Watch’.”

And of course that’s part of what we’re doing in Advent ----- watching ----- and waiting --- and preparing ----- for the celebration that is Christmas ---- a recounting and commemorating Christ’s first arrival on His birthday.

And of course also part of what we are doing in Advent is anticipating ---- watching --- and waiting and preparing for His second --- final coming --- at the end of time as we know it.

So first --- watching and waiting and attending in a vigilant and intentional way ----- for His first arrival as a baby boy in a barn in Bethlehem.

And so what exactly does it mean to watch and wait and attend in this context ---- the context of celebrating an event that has already happened in the distant past?

Well part of the vigilant --- watching --- and waiting ---- and attending during Advent ---- is the very practical vigilance related to ensuring that Advent doesn't just get pushed aside and edged out by commercialism and consumerism.

It's about making sure that garlands ---- and ornaments --- and coloured lights --- and door crashing sales ----- don't take centre stage instead of Jesus Christ --- the light of the world.

Part of the vigilant disciplined watching --- waiting and attending of Advent is about setting and then keeping our focus on Christ.

It's about making sure that we can distinguish the difference between things Silent Night ----- Joy to the World ---- O come --- O come Emmanuel ----- and Chestnuts Roasting on an Open Fire ---- Rudolf the Red Nosed Reindeer ----- and Frosty the Snowman.

It's about making sure that we know ---- and remember --- and celebrate and teach our children --- grandchildren ---- neighbours ----- co-workers ---- the world ---- the difference between a Christmas tree and The Jesse Tree.

One's just an ornamental tree we place gifts under and the other is about tracing Christ back to God's will from the very beginning.

It about being clear about the difference between and Advent wreath --- and a Christmas wreath.

Christmas lights --- and the light of the world.

It's about knowing the difference between --- "The peace of Christ" --- being with us --- and something like "Holiday Spirit" --- or "Christmas cheer" ----- being with us.

It's about celebrating Christmas ----- Christ's mass ---- the worship and celebration of Jesus Christ --- and therefore saying things like "Merry Christmas" ----- and not just "Happy Holidays" --- or "Seasons Greetings".

It's about knowing that the reason for the season ---- the reason for Advent and for Christmas -----is Jesus Christ and not Santa Claus.

It's about the greatest gift of all ---- and not just toys --- games ---- and other worldly stuff.

That's what Advent vigilance --- and watching --- and waiting ---- is all about --- keeping focused on the right things and not giving in to the culture around us as it tries to shift our focus away from what Advent and Christmas are truly about.

The stakes at Advent are high ---- extremely high.

Jesus Christ didn't just come to make people a little nicer ----- or to encourage people to be a little more generous for a few weeks of the year.

Jesus didn't just come to give people the opportunity to think about a bit better world.

Jesus came to make straight the crooked way ----- to right every wrong ----- -- to upend every injustice ----- and to reconcile all things to Himself.

And in comparison to this --- all of the other things that we see around us --- ----- are tiny.

Cards ----- trees ---- ornaments ---- lights ---- Santa Claus ---- elves ---- reindeer ---- red nosed and black nosed ----- 20 40 and 50% off sales ----- -- turkey rolls ---- and jelly rolls ----- they're all pretty silly ----- and secondary ----- in comparison to the real reason for Advent --- Jesus Christ.

So that's kind of the intentional disciplined --- vigilant ---- watching --- and waiting --- and preparing ---- as it applies to Advent and the upcoming birth of Christ.

But even bigger and more important and more crucial is how all of this watching --- and waiting --- and preparing relates to Christ's second coming ----- at the end of time as we know it.

A question ---

How would we spend this Advent if we knew that Jesus was actually going to come again --- at Christmas --- once and for all?

What would the next 25 days look like if we knew they were the last 25 days in the history of the universe as we know it?

That's a bigger and more crucial question than just what are we watching and waiting and attending on and preparing for --- thinking there will be this Christmas and then many more after it as well.

There's a whole lot more on the line in Advent if we think of it in these terms --- the very last couple of weeks ever.

The kind of watching ---- and waiting --- and preparing that we are called to engage in during Advent is this kind of watching --- waiting --- and preparing --- anticipating Jesus' coming once and for all --- as opposed to just the commemoration of His birthday --- as important as that is too.

Indeed all year long --- everyday --- our focus is best honed in on preparing - -- watching and waiting ----- attending on Jesus' coming not just at Christmas ceremonially ----- but some day --- we know not when ---- into every town --- the world over without exception.

Advent isn't just about watching and waiting and preparing passively or individually.

Advent is a reminder of the wonder and beauty and saving love that has already come ---- in Jesus Christ.

And it's about calling us to live out this same love --- offering an alternative to the world.

An alternative to sales ----- and ornaments ----- and garlands ----- material things ----- all year long --- all life long.

Unfortunately Christianity in affluent places like Canada too often focuses on the needs ---- wants ----- desires ----- sins --- attitudes ---- and relationships with God of the individual --- without adequate concern for the communal as well.

True Christian community often proves difficult when we experience personality clashes ---- conflict --- selfishness --- and a whole host of other challenges that can make it difficult to build and live in authentic Christian community together.

Advent is not just about watching --- and waiting --- and attending on God coming again sometime soon as if it hasn't ever happened before.

It also includes celebrating together ---- and remembering that indeed He has already come in Jesus Christ --- He has already shown us what to expect and what to engage in.

In Christ who has already come ---- we see the kind of lives ---- and the kind of love that we are to do and be.

Advent reminds us that one day God will act again decisively --- just as He already has once before a few thousand years ago in Bethlehem.

And until that day comes we as the Church of Christ --- aren't just called to sit around passively ----- we are called to nurture each other --- care for and love each other --- church members and non church members --- everyone -- - bearing witness to Christ for all to see and experience.

And not only this but we are called to suffer together ----- to repent together ---- to forgive each other and get over past mistakes ----- to work and witness together ----- despite our sometimes differences of opinion.

God empowers us --- as disciples of Jesus Christ ----- to demonstrate to the world ---- that people with different points of view ---- that people with

different wants and needs --- that people with different preferences for music ----- that diverse people can come together to form a community --- that loves ----- gives --- helps --- seeks justice and works for dignity and respect for all ----- that sacrifices ----- forgives and forgets ----- and seeks spiritual growth and development together.

The gospel truth is that a community accomplishes more and bears more effective witness than any one individual ever can all alone.

Without a supporting and challenging community ---- people fizzle out ---- and tire --- turning in on them selves.

Without a community people lack the support and the challenges --- the opportunities for growth and refinement that can only be provided by living in community with others.

Part of what Mark's gospel invites us to live out ----- is for the church to show the leadership and spiritual maturity that says ---- "Hey rest of the world ----- Christ shows us a better way to live and we are doing it ---- come join in the fun ---- come join in the joy of life in Christ."

The joy --- by the way don't you love our new sign out front ---- Joy ---- what a great message out in front of the church.

Joy ---- in big --- bold ---- simple letters.

This is a place of Joy --- Joy because of Jesus.

Jesus says in Mark's gospel today ----- verses 32 to 37:

"But about that day or hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. Be on guard! Be alert! You do not know when that time will come. It's like a man going away: He leaves his house and puts servants in charge, each with their assigned task, and tells the one at the door to keep watch.

Therefore keep watch because you do not know when the owner of the house will come back ----- whether in the evening, or at midnight, or when the rooster crows, or at dawn. If he comes suddenly, do not let him find you sleeping. What I say to you, I say to everyone: 'Watch!'"

Jesus is the man who leaves His house --- this world ---- all God's people ---  
-- in our hands ---- we are the servants in charge.

And we all have assigned tasks just as the servants in the story did ---- and  
just like them we too have to keep watch --- and be ready for His return.

And as we await His return --- we are called to demonstrate the same kind of  
vigilant --- disciplined ---- preparedness --- as those in the passage ----- all  
doing their part ---- together.

And specifically we are to be a presence --- a collection of people ----  
damaged banged up --- full of faults and warts ---- and disagreements as we  
may be ----- we are to be a presence in the world that celebrates --- shares ---  
-- and mediates Christ.

We are to live out the alternative way that is the way ---- the truth --- the  
light that is Jesus Christ.

And Advent is a prime opportunity to live out this alternative way of being  
and relating -----like no other time in the church year or secular year.

When everyone else is consumed with deals and decorations ----- we are to  
be consumed with Christ and His love.

Watching --- watching for God revealing Christ --- today perhaps ---  
tomorrow perhaps --- every day perhaps --- as God so sees fit.

Watching ----- watching for opportunities to be and share Christ with the  
world.

Waiting --- and by the way it's not passive waiting but active waiting ---  
more like attending.

Waiting ----- for God to act decisively once again in Christ.

And preparing.

Preparing our hearts --- our family ---- our homes --- our communities -----  
our friends our co-workers ---- the world ----- for His arrival ---  
symbolically at Christmas --- and finally ---- at the second coming.

These are what Advent is all about.

Silent Night and Joy to the World and not just Chestnuts roasting on an open fire --- as nice as that song can be it's not the heart of what we're about the way Silent Night --- Joy to the World ---- oh Come all ye faithful --- and so on are.

Advent wreaths with candles --- that symbolize ---- celebrate Jesus --- the light of the world ----- and not just Christmas wreaths that don't really point to anything beyond just themselves.

"The peace of Christ" --- as opposed to just "Holiday Cheer" ---- or "Holiday Spirit."

“Marry Christmas” --- as opposed to just “Seasons Greetings.”

Jesus Christ and not just Santa Claus.

These are what Advent is all about.

And so today ---- we kick off that great ---- and much anticipated season of -  
----- waiting --- watching ---- preparing.

Kind of the same thing we do all year long --- all life long as Christians ---  
waiting --- watching --- preparing.

Only it's highlighted this time of the year.

And it's highlighted --- because more than any other time of the year ---  
what we do is in stark contrast to the rest of our culture.

We offer an alternative way of being and living.

We offer Jesus Christ and not just all the other stuff that Christmas can be  
about --- the passing ephemeral stuff.

When He comes --- no one knows ----- not even the angels in heaven --- not  
even Jesus Christ Himself ----- but only God the Father.

But then again we do know that He has already come ---- and Christmas ----  
His birthday reminds of this every year.

And so we offer Christ --- we live out Christ.

Not knowing when He will come again --- but simply that He will come  
again.

And we do it ----- full of hope --- and faith ---- and we do so with Joy in our  
hearts.

In the meantime ---- we watch.

In the meantime ----- we wait.

In the meantime ---- we prepare ---- together --- as a community of faith.

And as we do ---- we offer an alternative to the way of the rest of our  
culture.

Amen.