

## Looking for God

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Year B: Advent 1: Mark 13:24-37

<sup>24</sup>“But in those days, after that suffering, the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light,<sup>25</sup> and the stars will be falling from heaven, and the powers in the heavens will be shaken. <sup>26</sup>Then they will see ‘the Son of Man coming in clouds’ with great power and glory. <sup>27</sup>Then he will send out the angels, and gather his elect from the four winds, from the ends of the earth to the ends of heaven.

<sup>28</sup>“From the fig tree learn its lesson: as soon as its branch becomes tender and puts forth its leaves, you know that summer is near. <sup>29</sup>So also, when you see these things taking place, you know that he is near, at the very gates. <sup>30</sup>Truly I tell you, this generation will not pass away until all these things have taken place. <sup>31</sup>Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.

<sup>32</sup>“But about that day or hour no one knows, neither the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. <sup>33</sup>Beware, keep alert; for you do not know when the time will come. <sup>34</sup>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. <sup>35</sup>Therefore, 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, <sup>36</sup>or else he may find you asleep when he comes suddenly. <sup>37</sup>And what I say to you I say to all: Keep awake.

*As we watch for God this Advent season, we see God not only in the festive places, but also in death and decay. God refuses to be bound by our expectations, norms, rituals, and does what no other god ever has. God comes to earth to know death and decay with us. For us. Therein lies our hope!*

Blessed Advent season to you! Blessed Advent season to all. God is here. Amen.

Jesus’ words, “Keep awake!” are the exact opposite of what parents tell their children on Christmas Eve. “Go to sleep!” “Santa won’t come unless you go to sleep!”

Well, it wasn’t Santa. Quite the opposite in fact. Here, almost at the end of Mark’s Gospel, we hear Jesus telling the disciples what it will be like when the temple is destroyed. Everything they know about where faith is practiced and God experienced - will be gone. He is preparing them for their unknown future – without the Jerusalem temple.

Remember that all of this doom and gloom language is part and parcel of what we in the church name as “apocalyptic” texts. These are end time scriptures. They describe the end of the world as the disciples would know it. Additionally, since Jesus didn’t return in their lifetime as expected, now these words hold weight for us...longing for the pain of our world to end with Jesus’ anticipated return.

Jesus describes that the sun and moon will be darkened, the stars will fall from the heavens before the Son of Man will return. But not one of us – nor the wise ones, the prophets, the soothsayers or even Jesus Himself, know the day or time when Jesus will come again.

In our Bibles, these end time texts are ultimately meant to give hope to the persecuted. Stay strong! New life through God is on the horizon. Keep the faith. Get on your knees. God hears your prayers.

So, if that is the case, Jesus’ words are comforting actually. Rather than being distressing, Jesus gives the disciples hope that in Him, new life and a new reality will come into being. Their current existence and ours as well, are going to be completely re-ordered, renewed and regenerated when our Lord returns a second time. Wahoo! Alleluia!

Rev. Dr. Karoline Lewis names an Advent question. In the midst of the chaos of the season or of the world, “Where will we look for God this Advent season?”<sup>i</sup> Where will we look for God?

We all recognize, it’s easy to see God in the good times. Family gathered around the eggnog and the Christmas ham. Love in the eyes of that person when they open that ‘perfect’ gift from us. Oh yes, God is there. Absolutely.

(pause) Where is God in the obliterated villages of Ukraine? Where is God in the dust and rubble of Gaza? Where is God in the children’s tears of incarcerated parents? Those ones who won’t get a gift. Seniors in nursing homes who have no visitors. Where is God right now?

If Jesus is saying anything, what He is really saying, is that God is in all those places too! God, in Jesus is going to return when creation does what it shouldn’t do! When the sky lights go dark and stars fall when they ought to stay hung in the darkness...it’s then! Then and there, is when Jesus will return.

‘Then they will see ‘the Son of Man coming in clouds’ with great power and glory. <sup>27</sup>Then he will send out the angels, and gather his elect from the four winds,

from the ends of the earth to the ends of heaven...Heaven and earth will pass away.’ Literally everything that we know and find comfort and ritual and consistency in, is going to be gone.

But wait! All those things will pass away, yet ‘my words will not pass away.’ When chaos and destruction arrive, there is God.

One-year post-Christmas, I had the weekend off and visited a church. They still had their decorations up. There before the altar, was a small wooden manger, very similar to the one we have. But instead of a fake baby doll wrapped in a blanket, there inside the manger was a wooden cross.

My first thought was, “these party-poopers. Where is their Christmas spirit?” Oh, the folly of first impressions! Of course, there was a cross. Jesus was born to die. His life for our life, nailed into the cross. The same wood that made the manger, built the cross as well.

For God refuses to be bound by our expectations, norms, even our Christmas rituals, and does what no other god ever has. God comes to earth to know death and decay with us. For us. Therein lies our Advent hope! And Jesus will do it again!

Keep awake in the midst of chaos! Know who you are looking for! Know that you will find God there!

Because of our sinful, fallen world, Christmas just cannot and will not get wrapped up and tied neatly with a pretty bow! Just because we know how to shop, wrap, send cards and host parties doesn’t mean that we can check Christmas off the list come December 26<sup>th</sup>. Jesus won’t allow that! God is bigger than that!

On Christmas morning, unless Jesus comes before then, there is a good chance that bombs will still be exploding, parents will still be incarcerated, lonely seniors will be forgotten, children will still be hungry, disease, death and decay will remain one type of world order.

But what will order our hearts...is the still, small, powerful, almighty, glorious and at times confounding presence of God. From that place, God will call us out to serve.

Where will we look for God this Advent season? God in the operating room. God in the line of homeless waiting for their Christmas ham. God snuggled in around

sleeping bags in cars with our guests. God with the depressed or newly divorced. God with the soldiers. God with the widows. God here, there and everywhere. God with us...God with us...God with us.

That, is very, very good news.

Keep awake! Don't miss it! Don't miss seeing God this Advent. Amen.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.workingpreacher.org/commentaries/revised-common-lectionary/first-sunday-of-advent-2/commentary-on-mark-1324-37>