

The Sunday Missive -- December 1, 2024 The First Sunday in Advent

59 Hark, a thrilling voice is sounding

Hark! a thrilling voice is sounding. "Christ is nigh," it seems to say;
"Cast away the works of darkness, O ye children of the day."

Wakened by the solemn warning, from earth's bondage let us rise;
Christ, our sun, all sloth dispelling, shines upon the morning skies.

Lo the Lamb, so long expected, comes with pardon down from heaven;
Let us haste, with tears of sorrow, one and all to be forgiven;

Honor, glory, might, and blessing to the Father and the Son,
With the everlasting Spirit, while unending ages run.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Kw3uZGYmgr8>

Lighting the Advent Wreath

Holy One, we praise you for your son Jesus Christ,
who is Emmanuel, the hope of the peoples,
the wisdom that teaches and guides us,
the Savior of every nation.

Let your blessing come upon us as we light this wreath.
May it be a sign of Christ's promise to bring us salvation. May
he come quickly, and not delay.

Hymn 56 O come, O come Emmanuel

O come, O come, Emmanuel, and ransom captive Israel
That mourns in lonely exile here until the Son of God appear.
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel shall come to you, O Israel.

O come, O Wisdom from on high, who ordered all things mightily;
To us the path of knowledge show and teach us in its ways to go. Rejoice!
Rejoice! Emmanuel shall come to you, O Israel.

Collect of the Day

Almighty God, give us grace to cast away the works of darkness, and put on the armor of light, now in the time of this mortal life in which your Son Jesus Christ came to visit us in great humility; that in the last day, when he shall come again in his glorious majesty to judge both the living and the dead, we may rise to the life immortal; through him who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.

Jeremiah 33:14-16

The days are surely coming, says the Lord, when I will fulfill the promise I made to the house of Israel and the house of Judah. In those days and at that time I will cause a righteous Branch to spring up for David; and he shall execute justice and righteousness in the land. In those days, Judah will be saved and Jerusalem will live in safety. And this is the name by which it will be called: "The Lord is our righteousness."

Psalms 25:1-9

To you, O Lord, I lift up my soul* *My God, I put my trust in you*

Let me not be humiliated* *Nor let my enemies triumph over me.*

Let none who look to you be put to shame* *But let the treacherous be disappointed in their schemes.*

Show me your ways, O Lord* *And teach me your paths.*

Lead me in your truth and teach me* *For you are the God of my salvation; in you have I trusted all the day long.*

Remember, O Lord, your compassion and love* *For they are from everlasting.*

Remember not the sins of my youth and my transgressions* *Remember me according to your love and for the sake of your goodness, O Lord.*

Gracious and upright is the Lord* *Who teaches sinners in the way of righteousness.*

Who guides the humble in doing right* ***And teaches godly ways to the lowly.***

All the paths of the Lord are love and faithfulness* ***To those who keep God's covenant and testimonies.***

1 Thessalonians 3:9-13

How can we thank God enough in return for all the joy that we feel because of you? Night and day we pray most earnestly that we may see you face to face and restore whatever is lacking in your faith.

Now may our God and Father himself and our Lord Jesus direct our way to you. And may the Lord make you increase and abound in love for one another and for all, just as we abound in love for you. And may he so strengthen your hearts in holiness that you may be blameless before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all his saints.

Lift Every Voice and Sing Hymn 103 Steal Away

Steal away, steal away, steal away to Jesus!
Steal away, steal away home, I ain't got long to stay here!

My Lord calls me, he calls me by the thunder;
The trumpet sounds within-a my soul,
I ain't got long to stay here.

My Lord calls me, he calls me by the lightning,
The trumpet sounds within-a my soul,
I ain't got long to stay here.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Wo0A0f9b6fU>

Gospel Luke 21:25-36

Jesus said, "There will be signs in the sun, the moon, and the stars, and on the earth distress among nations confused by the roaring of the sea and the waves. People will faint from fear and foreboding of what is coming upon the world, for the powers of the heavens will be shaken. Then they will see

'the Son of Man coming in a cloud' with power and great glory. Now when these things begin to take place, stand up and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near."

Then he told them a parable: "Look at the fig tree and all the trees; as soon as they sprout leaves you can see for yourselves and know that summer is already near. So also, when you see these things taking place, you know that the kingdom of God is near. Truly I tell you, this generation will not pass away until all things have taken place. Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.

"Be on guard so that your hearts are not weighed down with dissipation and drunkenness and the worries of this life, and that day catch you unexpectedly, like a trap. For it will come upon all who live on the face of the whole earth. Be alert at all times, praying that you may have the strength to escape all these things that will take place, and to stand before the Son of Man."

Waiting for Today -- Advent 1C

Gracious Creator, in this Advent of expectation, draw us together in unity, that our praise and worship might echo in these walls and also through our lives. In this Advent of expectation, draw us together in mission, that the hopes within us might be the songs we sing: the melodies of our lives. In this Advent of expectation, draw us together that the paths of service we follow might lead us from a lowly stable to a glorious eternity with you. Amen.

Thanks be to God for this Advent, oh so old and always new, ever changing, ever true. Our stories this morning speak to us of the challenging and humbling but glorious experience of being in need, in need of God's loving care. They speak of what it feels like to acknowledge ourselves as ever to be hungry and parched until we bring ourselves to the table and the wellspring of God's love.

Just as in Lent, there is, of course an expectancy in Advent that sees a great and momentous occurrence at season's end. But in Advent, it's harder to feel this as waiting when we seem to be celebrating Christmas the minute Thanksgiving is over. Some stores just say the heck with it and start their stampedes on Thanksgiving Day. We saw an ad last week that said, "Get ready for Xmas, come shop at 'so and so's.'" Shorthand shilling for manipulative merchants seems a far cry from joyfully preparing for the holy festival Christmas once was. Waiting during Advent sometimes seems more

like revving up than contemplating holiness.

There is an irony to our waiting that we seem to overlook if we're not careful. We celebrate Jesus' coming into the World by the power of the Holy Spirit, but in order to celebrate, we must know that He is already here. If we are to be Christians in thought word and deed, we are meant to always be aware of the Incarnation, always aware of the Passion, and always "Easter People" too, as the saying goes. So why set a day for Christmas at all? Why wait?

There are some practical reasons. Long about the darkest days of the year, it's awfully nice to have something like Christmas to look forward to. The psychologists will tell you we tend to be glummer the grimmer the weather. Hence the symptoms of Seasonal Affective Disorder: SAD. Since time immemorial, we have recognized the winter solstice as a yearly pivot point and thus a cause for celebration. From now on, as the days grow longer and the sun grows stronger, things start looking up. So it is no great mystery that, among the followers of Jesus, whose appearance was the great turning point of history, the season agreed upon for the commemoration of Jesus' birth is now. If Christianity had spread southward first, instead of northward, Christmas would indeed come in July, or June anyway. Also, let's face it, for a system that runs on commerce, it's practical to have a reason to encourage buying. We know it is more blessed to give than to receive, but both are fun. Xmas in an advertisement, however, is probably too much fun to stand.

Lest we dismiss several reasons for having Christmas as secular and therefore vaguely sinful, or at least irrelevant to the God-fearing, we should bear in mind that ways and means of being happy – in moderation -- are very much good for our souls; they truly are part of God's plan for us. But why must Christmas be holy too? With all these other reasons for Christmas, why are we here on this First Sunday of Advent wondering, talking and singing about the imminent arrival of God's very self among us, the long-expected Jesus, the much-heralded One who will fulfil God's promise made to Israel, pluck our feet out of the net, and teach us the ways we should choose; who will come from clouds, descending to let us know our redemption is at hand?

Why indeed, if Jesus is always going to show up, why are we waiting? Well, for one thing, patience and expectation are good practice. There are few subjects about which more ink has been spilled, more rhetoric spoken, more tales spun than the question of 'When?' "How long, O Lord, will this go

on?" "When will we be free?" The scholars say that St. Paul and the early Christians assumed that the final days and the return of Jesus in glory were practically upon them. Any minute then, things stood to get exceedingly hairy and all the fertilizer would hit the big fan in the sky. Jeremiah predicted it; Luke brought it into even sharper focus: There will be signs in the sun, the moon, and the stars, and on the earth distress among nations confused by the roaring of the sea and the waves. People will faint from fear and foreboding of what is coming upon the world, for the powers of the heavens will be shaken. But it hadn't happened then, and it hasn't happened yet. Although, considering the brutal way we tend to treat the planet and our fellow creatures, you could hardly blame Mother Earth if she decided to evict us.

The Left-Behinders would have us believe that something is about to happen, really soon, for real this time, but they miss the point. Ask anybody in Sri Lanka or New Orleans if the waves and the sea have done any roaring lately. Ask anybody in Ukraine or Gaza or Sudan if there are wars or only just rumors of wars. Today especially, on the 36th Annual World AIDS Awareness Day, ask any of the 40 million people living with HIV – one in 200 – or anyone whose loved ones perished from Covid19 whether there are plagues. Overwhelming percentages of those dying of these have been poor, marginalized people at home and worldwide. We look at these things and wonder if the end times are somewhere in the unknown future, or if there might be another explanation.

Then Jesus told them a parable: "Look at the fig trees; as soon as they sprout leaves you know that Summer is near. So also, when you see these things taking place, you know that the Kingdom of God is near." Well the fig tree sprouts every year, God willing. Fig trees have been sprouting ever since Jesus uttered those words; they sprouted long before, too. Not only that, winds and waves and wars and plagues have been taking lives all along. "Truly I tell you, this generation will not pass away until all things have taken place." In other words, these are the good old days, but these are bad days too. "Be on guard so that your hearts are not weighed down with dissipation and drunkenness and the worries of this life, and the day catch you unexpectedly, like a trap."

Now we all know that believing in the love of God in Christ is not going to help you breathe if there's a 40ft Tsunami over you. Jesus knew that too. He came here to show us what to do in the face of plagues and wars and waves and winds and fire. Jesus' admonition to wake up and be God's people is today's business. For Jesus is always coming – every year, every

day. We remind ourselves of this especially at Advent time, when our spiritual journey is heightened by the excitement of intentional waiting for the glory of Christmas. But we remind ourselves best by remembering who we are, people of love and accountability. What we are waiting for is the start of a new day, a day in which we will have the joy of going about business as usual.

Today we begin a time of being particularly intentional about the ends we seek in life. C. S. Lewis once famously said, "Don't waste time bothering whether you love your neighbor; just act as if you did. As soon as we do this we find one of the great secrets: When you are behaving as if you loved someone you will presently come to love them."

Once upon a time, back in the early days of the nation, it happened that one day, while the Connecticut House of Representatives was in session, a great storm blew up outside the windows of their meeting hall. The sky grew dark with terrible flashes of lightning and deafening thunderclaps. As the wind howled and the trees were straining and breaking, it started to hail and panes of glass began to crash into the room. The members of the House were understandably alarmed. Some of the more religiously volatile of their number began to assert that the final day was upon them. A group of these gathered around Colonel Davenport, the Speaker of the House, demanding that he adjourn the session so they might go home and prepare themselves for the Judgment that was upon them. Without a pause, Davenport replied, "Gentlemen, the Day of Judgment is either approaching or it is not. If it is not, there is no cause for adjournment. If it is, I should like to be found doing my duty. I therefore ask instead that more candles be brought to increase our light."

As many as there are kinds of birds and shells and trees and people in God's World, so many are the varieties of service and opportunities for neighbor love in each of our lifetimes. This Advent of expectation, the question is not, is Jesus going to show up, the question is, are we? "Therefore," so that we might better see the variety of opportunities before us, "let more candles be brought, to increase our light!"

Hymn 72 Hark! The glad sound, the Savior comes

Hark, the glad sound! the Savior comes, the Savior promised long:
Let every heart prepare a throne, and every voice a song.

He comes, the prisoners to release in Satan's bondage held;
The gates of brass before him burst, the iron fetters yield.

He comes, the broken heart to bind, the bleeding soul to cure;
And with the treasures of his grace to enrich the humble poor.

Our glad hosannas, Prince of Peace, thy welcome shall proclaim;
And heaven's eternal arches ring with thy beloved Name.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9KppZkeJD6k>

This is the Time

This is precisely the time
When artists go to work.
There is no time for despair,
No place for self-pity,
No need for silence,
No room for fear.
We speak.
We write.
We do language.
This is how civilizations heal.

Toni Morrison