

Wait, Wait, Don't Tell Me
First Sunday of Advent (B)
Mark 13.24-37

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Keep alert! Stay awake!
Be prepared! Watch! Wait!
These are the imperatives, the commands of Advent,
 this church season adorned in blue
 signifying the new beginning of a new liturgical year.

Our secular calendar will hold off on the Auld Lang Syne for five more weeks.
But this morning with one candle lit on our evergreen wreath,
 With "Lo! He Comes with Clouds Descending," we begin anew.

The instructions sound quite simple,
 any scout would recognize a piece of our Advent motto.
Be prepared! Stay awake! Wait.

Yesterday afternoon as one of our fifth graders was quizzing me on the names of all her classmates, I found myself using a familiar phrase and the namesake of that fun NPR quiz show.

"Do you know who this is?" she asked me, pointing to yearbook photos one at a time and covering up the names.

Wait... Wait... Don't tell me, I'd say.
For the most part I did well, better than I sometimes do when I'm listening to Carl Castle and Peter Segal and the cast of guest celebrities as I run Saturday errands.

Wait...wait...don't tell me.
I want to figure it out.
I will remember.
I can do it by myself.

This seems to be a very simple description of our human nature.
This "Wait, Wait, Don't Tell Me."
 From the toddler wanting to feed himself
 to the teen exploring her way into adulthood,
 From the young adult searching for his first job
 to the grandmother clinging onto her keys and drivers license.

Let me do it.
I don't need your help.
I can figure it out.

Self-sufficiency, this “I can” attitude, is, from a very young age, applauded in our society. The ability to read alone, to complete assignments or tasks alone, to tie one’s shoes by oneself are all seen as good things.

But what do we do in those moments when all we have and all we are just doesn’t seem to cut it? When the waiting seems too long, and the figuring out unclear, what do we do?

I can only imagine how the first disciples felt.

Or how that audience to first hear Mark experienced the gospel.

It wasn’t easy-living for any of them.

Fishermen, tax collectors, women and children and others on the fringe.

Mark’s audience, according to most scholars,

would have been living in a time of great fear for Christ-followers.

Jesus’ words in our gospel reading this morning are often referred to as The Little Apocalypse. Apocalypse meaning revelation or unveiling. Jesus is painting a picture for people in search of answers and meaning and hope.

After the suffering, Jesus begins, after the suffering,
the sun will be darkened, as will the moon.

The stars will fall from heaven;

the Son of Man shall come in clouds

and reach out to the ends of the earth and to the ends of heaven

and gather up the elect from the four winds.

This is apocalyptic language at its very best.

Seemingly strange or cryptic,

Time is not cyclical, but linear, leading up to God’s final judgment or gathering,
leading to Christ’s return in great power and glory.

Frightening? Maybe.

If Advent is the season of preparation, for what do we prepare?

Watching, waiting, anticipating what?

This season and its sentiment aren’t about a cute little baby nestled in a bed of straw.

Jesus’ birth is an important piece of our theological foundation and weekly confession.

Perhaps it’s more comforting to imagine the delicacy of an infant

Than the power of one emerging from the clouds with rain and thunder and darkness.

But if we were to stop with a Christmas morning, we would be left without full redemptive hope.

Our Advent preparation serves to remind us of God who is powerful and glorious and strong.

God who in Jesus came among us to love and to heal and to teach and to challenge.

Advent is the time when we recall God’s promise to come again.

The very rhythm with which we organize our calendar as church,

is intentional in reminding us of who we are as God's people,
and who God is in Jesus the Christ.

In religion class this last week, our fifth graders learned a song about the liturgical year.
They created their own church calendars, like this one.
Tomorrow, they'll learn a little bit more about each season.
Advent reminds us that Christ will come again.
This is but part of the faith narrative: Christ has died, Christ is risen, Christ will come again.
In our communion liturgy, we proclaim these words together as church.

We remind ourselves and each other that God has done glorious things through the life and
crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus. God is still doing glorious and powerful things now. Jesus
comes to us in this holy supper. *And* Christ will come again.

Wait...wait... don't tell me.
We are tempted to think we can figure it all out, just as the first human ones in the garden.
We try to fill in all the right answers on the right lines in life.
And yet, we fail. We fall short.
We get angry and scared
 and we act out these emotions
 in ways that can be harmful to ourselves or others or creation.

In those moments when all we have and all we are just doesn't seem to cut it.
When the waiting seems too long, and the figuring out unclear,
We rest our hope in God.
We lean on our brothers and sisters and church community.
We come to the table to be fed.
We dip our fingers in the waters where we were named,
 sealed with the Holy Spirit,
 marked with the cross of Christ.

Our preparations, our waiting, our alertness and waking are not limited to this season.
And yet in Advent when we see growing darkness and hear of stars falling,
 we are reminded of Christ's triumph over it all and Christ's promise of return.

In Word, in Sacraments, in Christian community, we wait.
We wait.
Not in the hope of figuring it all out or doing it all by ourselves.

We wait
 in the hope of God who loves us and redeems us and calls us God's own.
A blessed Advent upon us all.
Wait. Wait.

To the glory of God.