

#1 11-12

Spiritual Awakenings

Isaiah 64:1-9

Psalm 80:1-7, 17-19

1 Corinthians 1:3-9

Mark 13:24-37

24 "In those days, after the suffering of that time, the sun will become dark, and the moon won't give its light. 25 The stars will fall from the sky, and the planets and other heavenly bodies will be shaken. 26 Then they will see the Human One coming in the clouds with great power and splendor. 27 Then he will send the angels and gather together his chosen people from the four corners of the earth, from the end of the earth to the end of heaven. 28 "Learn this parable from the fig tree. After its branch becomes tender and it sprouts new leaves, you know that summer is near. 29 In the same way, when you see these things happening, you know that he's near, at the door. 30 I assure you that this generation won't pass away until all these things happen. 31 Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will certainly not pass away. 32 "But nobody knows when that day or hour will come, not the angels in heaven and not the Son. Only the Father knows. 33 Watch out! Stay alert! You don't know when the time is coming. 34 It is as if someone took a trip, left the household behind, and put the servants in charge, giving each one a job to do, and told the doorkeeper to stay alert. 35 Therefore, stay alert! You don't know when the head of the household will come, whether in the evening or at midnight, or when the rooster crows in the early morning or at daybreak. 36 Don't let him show up when you weren't expecting and find you sleeping. 37 What I say to you, I say to all: Stay alert!"

This is the Word of our Lord

All the scriptures for today have one thing in common – they all deal with waiting. Isaiah, "If only you would tear open the heavens and come down!" Our Psalm, "Wake up your power! Come to us!" From our Epistle, "The result is that you aren't missing any spiritual gift *while you wait* for our Lord Jesus Christ to be revealed." Waiting for the Messiah! And yet, we here all know already – we aren't waiting, we have spent time with Christ and so there is no great clambering for him, for he is already shown himself to us.

One of the commentaries suggested that this was a way of helping us today to in some way put ourselves in the shoes of those Jews who were waiting for the Messiah to come, to put us in the place of those waiting as they had been before the birth of Jesus. Martin B. Copenhagen wrote:

In other respects, our contemporary anticipation of the coming of God's Promised One at Christmas is quite different from the experience of those who awaited the Messiah. After all, we all know whom we are waiting for. We know the day he will arrive. It is circled in red on our calendars. We have Advent calendars and Advent candles to help us count down to the promised day.

By contrast, of course, those who lived before the birth of Jesus did not know the day or hour of his arrival, so they needed to live in a continual state of watchfulness . . . By anticipating the return of the Son of Man here, at the beginning of Advent, we wait in the same way those who lived before Jesus was born waited, not knowing the day or the hour when the Messiah would appear.

So we can think of this day as a new focus – not waiting for the 25th of December – on Christmas – but on what it really means to await for Christ. We are all busy preparing for the holy day – a little under a month away – but how do we anticipate the presence of Christ everyday?

This gospel scripture has been called, "the little apocalypse". Jesus, the adult is anticipating end times, warning everyone to stay awake! Stay Alert! Be on your guard! It seems kind of odd to have this scripture - an adult Jesus pronouncing such cataclysmic catastrophes as, "The stars will fall from the sky, and the planets and other heavenly bodies will be shaken" – at the beginning of Advent. What we are all 'waiting for' will end up being a baby in a manger! Seems like a comedy act! People come screaming out of a room looking horrified – the music is loud and terrifying – and suddenly we see a close up of that which was the source of the fear and it is just a little baby with big eyes . . .

Christopher Hudson wrote that apocalyptic visions “are comments on present circumstances more than predictions of future events . . . The basic message of the apocalyptic vision is this: The rebellion against the reign of God is strong, as the wicked oppress the righteous. Things will get worse before they get better. But hang on just a little longer, because just when you are sure you cannot endure, God will intervene to turn the world right side up.”

When I read this I remembered a radio interview I had heard yesterday. Radio Netherlands Worldwide had a program on WAMU called "The State We're In". This series was called “Tough Guys” and the second interview was with a man named Lincoln Hall. He summited Mount Everest, but collapsed on his descent, unable to move, and was thought to be dead. There was so little a spark of life in him that no one could find it. After trying to revive him, his Sherpa guides had no choice but to leave him for dead at 8000 metres (26,000 feet). Eventually another group climbing up discovered that he wasn't dead and saved his life. He's written a book called, “Dead Lucky” and his web site totes him as a speaker, writer, and adventurer.

When asked about being left for dead and how he coped with it he commented, "I had learned many years ago that never giving up was always the best option in the mountains because you've got nothing else to do and you might get lucky and get down. So that was the attitude I had."

This is one of the greatest messages of living life that I know – the apocalypse comes in everyone's life to some extent, and focusing on that spark of life – that memory of hope – that waiting and expectation of hope – *that* can get you through times when you were left for dead, or considered hopeless.

So we wait in anticipation of hope. It is the difference in attitude of our waiting that makes a difference. Waiting at the station for the MARC to come and take you to work is a very different experience than waiting at that same station for the MARC to bring a loved one to you. And that is the hope of this first week of Advent – that somehow we could, if only for a fleeting moment – experience that spark of energy and excitement for the coming of Christ.

We start again today – it is a new year – a new hope – to believe that Christ has come, is here, will come again – that in the face of devastation, we can have hope! That somehow we will have the inspiration and the energy to do something great for someone else each day – be the Christ for others in need, and allow the Christ in others to serve us when we need it - that we recognize the pain and the need in each of us.

Recently I heard a song on a commercial, which is the theme song to the TV series, ‘Cheers’. The song received an Emmy Award nomination in 1983, for Outstanding Achievement in Music and Lyrics and it is frequently cited as one of the very best television theme songs of all time. I started really thinking about and feeling that song. You remember it:

Making your way in the world today Takes everything you've got/ Taking a break from all your
worries /Sure would help a lot
Wouldn't you like to get away? / Sometimes you want to go / Where everybody knows your name
/ And they're always glad you came / You wanna be where you can see / Our troubles are all the
same / You want to be where everybody knows your name / You wanna go where people know,
people are all the same, / You wanna go where everybody knows your name.

To have a place where you were treasured, and your idiosyncrasies were accepted. Can you imagine how thrilled you would be to go there? Isn't that what is each person's hope? Isn't that a train we could wait for with great excitement? How I wish each church could be like that, and I wish that feeling for each of us here. For the awakenings that Jesus is calling for is a spiritual awakening where we discover our common need for love and hope and joy and peace – and those are the themes for Advent – the promise of Christmas – and the truth about the world – it really could be such a place – it is at times and in places and the more we get used to it and crave it, the more we will find it. The spiritual alertness of hope now and forever. AMEN