## **Mark 13:24-37**

“But in those days, after that suffering,

the sun will be darkened,
 and the moon will not give its light,
 and the stars will be falling from heaven,
 and the powers in the heavens will be shaken.

Then they will see ‘the Son of Man coming in clouds’ with great power and glory. 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. “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. So also, when you see these things taking place, you know that he is near, at the very gates. Truly I tell you, this generation will not pass away until all these things have taken place. Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.

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

“Stir up your power, Lord Christ, and come.” This is what we pray each Sunday in Advent. But do we know what we are really praying for? These four Sundays, of course, lead up to the celebration of Jesus' birth, to the time when we will light candles in the dark cold of winter and thank God for the one born to save us. Christmas is a beautiful time to gather as God's people and behold the one born to bring peace and grace among us. I don't mean to disparage anything about the holiness of our Christmas

celebration. But here's the thing: Jesus was born over 2000 years ago. These Advent weeks, these days of watching for the baby to be placed in our home and church nativity scenes, are about more than Jesus' birth. They are about Jesus being born in our hearts, in our churches, in our governments and institutions, in the hearts of all the leaders of the world, not two thousand years ago, but right now. They are about Jesus blowing this world apart with his power.

Isaiah, the psalmist, Paul and Mark all foretell the earthshaking arrival of God in this world. “O that you would tear open the heavens and come down,” Isaiah writes, “so that the mountains would quake at your presence – as when fire kindles brushwood and the fire causes water to boil – to make your name known to your adversaries, so that the nations might tremble at your presence!” The psalmist writes, “Restore us, O God; let your face shine, that we may be saved.” Paul assures the people of Corinth that Jesus will strengthen them to the end, to the day when Jesus will return for them. And Mark gives us the most vivid and disturbing description of Jesus' arrival on earth, not in a manger, but on a day when the sun will go dark and the moon will not light the night sky. Mark tells of stars falling from heaven and the Son of Man coming in clouds, much as God did when he appeared to the prophets of ancient times.

“O that you would tear open the heavens and come down.” “Restore us, O God; let your face shine, that we may be saved.” “He will also strengthen you to the end, so that you may be blameless on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ.” “The sun will be darkened and the moon will not give its light...then they will see the Son of Man coming in clouds with great power and glory.” “Keep awake.” So often we read these prophesies as those of Jesus' second coming, a time we figure to be in the distant future since it hasn't happened in the 2000 years since Jesus was born on this earth. We shrug off the warnings about keeping alert, about not knowing when the time will come. We convince ourselves that we have as little to do with the timing of Jesus' second coming as we did with his first, that it has doesn't have much to do with the daily comings and goings of our lives and so we go on, the warnings about keeping awake barely registering on our individual and collective radar.

This is how we justify the lives we lead, this time in which we live, these days between the first arrival of Christ on earth and the second one in which all those frightening and threatening things will occur. This is how we make of our lives a kind of limbo, an in-between time that has less to do with God and more to do with our desire to make the most of the time we have here. The fulfilling of our needs, our wants, our pleasures. Jesus will return when he decides to return, we tell ourselves. In the meantime, we'll just do the best we can and enjoy what God has given us.

And what does that make of Jesus? It makes him a baby born in a manger, a preacher who taught us about God's love, a man who was killed for his radical ideas and a savior who will return at a time known only to him and his father. But what about now? What if Jesus is stirring up his power to come into our lives right now, if God is tearing open the heavens to come into this world right now, if the Son of Man is coming right now with great power and glory? What if Advent is about Jesus coming in the next minute or hour or day or week? What if keeping awake and alert means looking for Jesus to break into our lives and our world at any moment? What does that make of the limbo we have made of our lives, the blanket of complacency in which we have insulated ourselves?

Dictionary.com defines “advent” as “a coming into place, view, or being; arrival.” This season of Advent is about Jesus coming to take his place in our world, a world that our hands have broken and re-formed in our own disfigured image. It is about Jesus tearing open the heavens and arriving in great power and great anger to set things straight, to restore us to God's vision of a world in which beauty and truth and love reign. So where do we fit into this picture of Christ's kingdom breaking into our world? We stand convicted of our own sinfulness, of all the ways in which we have contributed to the brokenness of this world and all the times in which we have looked the other way when human power has been used to destroy and not build up. Because of who Jesus is, by his astounding grace, we stand forgiven of those sins and empowered to move forward with hands that heal instead of hurt, with words that forgive instead of hold grudges, with hearts that love instead of hate, with eyes that behold the green shoots of new life springing out of a barren landscape, even if we have to look hard to find them.

Advent is Jesus' arrival right here, right now. His judgment brings discomfort, anger and tears. We squirm under his disappointment with us. But rather than cast us aside as we might fire an incompetent employee, Jesus employs love and forgiveness to set us straight, to give us second chances, to view ourselves as he views us – as active members of his body: hands and feet and hearts empowered to bring his judgment and love to a horribly distorted and broken world.

There is a benediction attributed to St. Francis, which describes, I think, a powerful image of what Jesus' advent in our lives can look like as Christ stirs up his power and comes into our lives right here and now. I share it with you as my Advent hope for you, for me and for our church in a time of great anticipation, at a time that calls not for complacency but for trust in the power of God.

*May God bless you with DISCOMFORT...*

*At easy answers, half-truths, and superficial relationships,*

*So that you may live deep within your heart.*

*May God bless you with ANGER...*

*At injustice, oppression, and exploitation of people,*

*So that you may work for justice, freedom, and peace.*

*May God bless you with TEARS...*

*To shed for those who suffer from pain,*

*rejection, starvation and war.*

*So that you may reach out your hand to*

*comfort them and to turn their pain into*

*JOY.*

*And may God bless you with FOOLISHNESS...*

*To believe you can make a difference in*

*this world,*

*So that you can do*

*What others claim cannot be done.*

*To bring justice and kindness
To all our children and the poor.*

In this time of holy hope, stir up your power, Lord Christ, and come!

Amen.

*Advent 1B*

*December 3, 2017*

*Floyd-Willis Lutheran Parish*

*Mark 13:24-37*