

**Sunday, November 30, 2014**  
**Rev. Diane Monti-Catania**

Today is the first day of the new liturgical year, the beginning of Advent.

Year B, as it is called, focuses on the gospel as written by Mark.

Mark's gospel does not include a birth narrative nor any post-resurrection stories, so we will revisit Matthew and Luke through the Christmas season and then get quite a bit from John later on.

Scholars mostly agree that Mark is the earliest of the gospels probably written around the year 60.

Both Matthew and Luke's gospels are presumed to have used Mark as a source.

We know almost nothing about Mark – his gospel reveals no personal identifiers.

Some scholars say he was a companion of Peter's in Rome, while others imply that he might be the John Mark mentioned in Acts.

Mark's gospel focuses primarily on the suffering and death of Jesus with authentic discipleship characterized as self-sacrificial service to God.

Today's passage comes from the 13<sup>th</sup> chapter, late in Jesus' ministry.

We are reminded that just as we anticipate Christ's birth during advent, we must also live in anticipation of the second coming of Jesus Christ.

*The reading was the gospel of Mark 13: 24-37.*

**Sermon – “Waiting for Greatness”**

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How often do you consider the possibility of anything other than a natural death?

Are you a person who worries about terrorist attacks or stray bullets?

Have you ever had to be concerned with the possibility of dying from lack of food, water or shelter?

Have you ever been imprisoned by an enemy, afraid for your future?

Mark's gospel speaks to a first-century community of Jewish and Gentile Christians who are facing persecution.

They are living in an occupied land, subject to violence.

They live with fear and uncertainty every day.

Mark urges them to endure their suffering by holding onto the sure and certain hope of Jesus' return in glory, when he will gather his "elect from the ends of the earth to the ends of heaven."

Mark is offering hope to a people who are hopeless.

Jesus has been that promise of hope for generations of people living in occupied situations, oppressed, hungry, afraid.

From the depths of despair, for over two centuries, people have cried out for Jesus.

O Come, O Come Emmanuel.

Emmanuel,

God with us. God within us. God and us. One.

This promise need not be relegated to people whose lives are dismal.

We, too, are the children of this promise.

We, too, can be called out of darkness and into the bright light of Christian life.

Our darkness might have different disguises.

Our darkness might be more difficult to recognize than a terrorist on the corner with a gun.

Our darkness might be addiction to drugs or alcohol, or an obsession with food or television.

It might be something more subtle – a preoccupation with status or appearance;

a judgment of our neighbors;

a silence in the face of injustice.

Whatever darkness there is, Jesus is coming.

Jesus is coming to bring light and salvation into our lives.

Jesus is coming to make all things new.

“He will send out the angels to gather his elect from the four winds, from the ends of the earth to the ends of heaven.”

This is the promise of Advent.

This is what we get excited about in church!

Our Advent prayer this morning promised:

The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light;

those who lived in a land of deep darkness on them light has shined.

Even though the world seems dark and cold, we know that the light of Christ is coming.

The face of our Lord will shine, and we shall be saved!

Today, we lit the candle of Hope.

What do you hope for?

Paul's letter to the Romans says, "For in hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what is seen? But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience"

Hope and patience –two hallmarks of the advent season.

Mike Karpman, representing the Muslim Coalition of CT at our Thanksgiving service last Tuesday told us that Muslims believe that life is a test and that we are expected to meet each challenge with either patience or gratitude. When something is difficult, God expects us to be patience. When something is wonderful, God expects us to be grateful.

The world news in the past few weeks has been pretty dismal.

We don't easily see the blessings in contentious political debate or violent behavior in our own streets, however, this is perhaps when we most need hope.

One writer suggests, "It is the hope we have that God is at work in our world that gives us the security, the grace and the strength to live faithfully as followers of Christ and to make our contributions to the world's transformation."

What promises keep you going?

How does your faith sustain you in difficult situations?

Earlier this week, Tony Robinson reflected in these words:

"I am not sure what faith looks like exactly. But I'm pretty sure it looks like trust. Trust and a willingness to take a risk. And something more, often faith has an "in-spite-of" quality or look to it. Trusting and getting to your feet despite being crippled; believing and going when it's hard to do so and against the visible evidence."

He tells a story: Years ago, during an especially challenging time in my life, a lovely older friend gave me a three by five card with these words written on it: *"There is, in the universe, a power forever on the side of those brave enough to trust it."*

I think she was telling me, Robinson says, despite all, keep showing up just as fully as you possibly can.

And even when it's hard, even when you feel or are crippled in some way (aren't we all?), keep on trusting wildly in God.

I've held those words close to my heart a long time now.

He concludes with these questions:

Are you living in faith, by faith these days?

Can others see faith in you?"

Trusting wildly in God, having faith in all things, believing, beyond hope that Jesus Christ will come again in glory.

This is what the Advent season must be about.

We must not get lost in the crazy consumerism that has overtaken this sacred holiday.

Last week, our guest, Reverend Kent Siladi warned us about the dangers of being a 'luke warm' church. (please visit the website and hear his sermon if you missed it).

As we enter into the season of waiting, the season of preparation, let us be aware and awake of who we are and what we stand for.

Let us be the ones who take a bold stand about the sacredness of Christmas.

Let us be the ones who demonstrate with our very lives what it means to live with hope.

Let us be a church that takes our neighbors by the hand to lead them out of darkness and into the bright light of faith.

This Advent, rather than waiting for the baby, I want you to wait for the man.

I want you to imagine Jesus Christ walking directly into your life and asking you if there is room for Christ in your Christmas.

Be awake.

Be aware.

Live in hope.

O Come, O Come, Emmanuel.