

Why A Second Time? Isaiah 64:1-9; I Cor. 1:3-9; Mark 13: 24-37; Psalm 80: 1-7, 17-19 11-27-05

During the season of Advent, our lectionary readings turn to the Second Coming of Christ , reminding us that we all must remain alert and keep watching for that event.

The time of Advent is a time of expectant waiting for the birth of Christ. The color for the season is purple, a sign of royalty and a sign of penance. We light four candles during the Sundays of Advent: those of Hope, Forgiveness, Joy and Love. The Christ Candle is lit on Christmas Eve signifying the coming of the Light of the World into being.

For those who are strict biblical literalists, our reading from the Gospel of Mark describes just what will happen when Jesus descends from the heavens to appear once again to judge the quick and the dead. This event is portrayed as a cataclysmic, frightening time. The worthy will be raised up while those who are judged unworthy will be “left behind,” as a popular book series reminds us. No one knows when this will happen so we must always be at the ready.

It is quite true that we never know when our end may come as individuals or as a planet. We do not know the day or the hour. So, it follows that we need to make every minute of every day count before we are returned to from whence we cometh. This does not mean that we promise to do better tomorrow or next week, but that we stop right where we are in life, take a look at how we have been living and begin to develop a new understanding of the way in which we are to live and move and have our being.

If we do not remember how that is to be, we need only open our Bibles to the Gospel of Mark and begin to read. It is the shortest of the gospels and the one believed to have been written first. It will not require much time to complete. During these days and nights of Advent we might be more open to hearing the words and learning the way than at any other time of year.

The Hebrews were a lot like us, unless they could see God they couldn't quite believe in their Creator nor in the way they were to live. That is why the reading from the prophet Isaiah for today beseeches God to “come on down” and straighten them out once again. As they wandered around in the wilderness they often went off course. The appearance of God before them would help them believe in a power greater than they were and encourage them to follow the leaders they had who were blessed by God.

In our Christian thought process, those appearances by God did not seem to do much, so Jesus appeared on the scene. He came as the incarnation of God, to remind us, once again, that we need to straighten up and fly right if we are ever to attain eternal life in God's kingdom. While Jesus walked among humans, some heard and heeded his words and changed their way of living. Many did not. Some of those who followed fell away following his death and resurrection. Others, upon being visited by the Holy Spirit were renewed in their efforts to persevere and continue the spread of the Good News of Christ. That is why we sit here, in this place this morning--something amazing occurred and we must always be grateful for it.

Knowing all this, why is it important for us to think about the second time of Christ's appearance? Do we believe that we need to be scared half to death to believe in following the way of a Christian? Does that make sense to us? Or is there another way?

I believe that we need to remain alert for any sign that tells us that Christ has room in our hearts and souls. While we sometimes think this needs to be shown to us through a dramatic or even traumatic happening, I would like to suggest this morning that does not have to be the case.

When some small window of love or caring or concern for our fellow humans pops open in our hearts and souls, and we become aware that we can do something to hold out a helping hand, Christ enters in. That is a second appearance, a second coming for us.

The small act of taking a Christmas wish from the tree and fulfilling it, not to impress anyone, but simply to make a wish come true, speaks volumes for those who have chosen to do so. Just as bringing a can of food for our baskets in the narthex, speaks volumes for those who do so week after week just so someone else can have something to eat. Yes, it makes us feel good and that is not all bad. But it also touches the elemental need we all have within ourselves to give to something greater than ourselves. It stirs that need we have to share with others from our abundance.

Don't ever doubt that the need is there. It is part of the Christ-light, the Second Coming, if you will, that dwells within each of us and that is meant to be revealed to all with whom we come in contact. This time of year nudges us in this direction more than any other time. Generosity of Spirit moves within us and makes us more complete individuals. We need only acknowledge this stirring.

Paul's warm words to the often-troubled church in Corinth remind all those who would wonder at this and doubt it, that the faithfulness of God bears us along and supports us when we reach outside ourselves. Sometimes this is a fearful thing for us to do, but when we venture forth in faith, hope moves beside us and sustains us.

Hope, the first of our candles that pierces the darkness is the one that burns longest of all in the Advent wreath. Hope for a brighter, better future for all. Hope that the celebration of the coming of Christ will develop deep roots that will take firm hold in our hearts and souls. "Hope that sends a shining ray far down the future's broadening way." Hope that will lead our warring world to a time of peace and understanding and justice.

Open your hearts and minds to another coming of the Christ Child, remembering always that "How silently, how silently, the wondrous gift is given, so God imparts to human hearts the blessing of his heaven. No ear may hear his coming, but in this world of sin, where meek souls will receive him still, the dear Christ enters in. Oh, Holy Child of Bethlehem, Descend to us we pray, cast out our sin and enter in Be born in us today, We hear the Christmas angels The great glad tidings tell; O come to us abide with us, Our Lord Emmanuel."

Amen