

God Only Knows

Mark 13:24-37

Advent Sunday I, Dec 3, 2017

Today is the First Sunday in Advent, meant to be a highly significant season in the Church year—although it lasts—for only four weeks! But who's to say that big gifts cannot come in small packages?

Unfortunately, however, there are a growing number of people TODAY, even within the Christian Church—who have come to falsely view the Advent Season simply as a part of the Christmas Season, although Advent was originally designed to be a separate season of the Church Year of its own when it first came about in the 4th Century AD.

Historically referenced as “The Winter Lent,” the four weeks of Advent are meant to be a penitential season; a time when each of us as the true disciples of Jesus Christ—should be expressly willing to allow God's Ten Commandments to genuinely scrutinize each of our lives; remembering that we are guilty, not only of committing sins of commission, but sins of omission as well!

The Advent Season is meant to be to the Christmas Season what the Season of Lent is meant to be the Easter Season!

AND HISTORICALLY SPEAKING THE ADVENT SEASON INVITES US TO LOOK BACK TO TWO VERY IMPORTANT PLACES IN THE HISTORY OF GOD'S OLD TESTAMENT PEOPLE!

(1) THE FIRST PLACE WOULD BE TO THE YEAR 607 BC, when the people of God living in the southern kingdom of Judah were carted off as political exiles by a foreign power--known as the Babylonians--where they would live for the next 70 years.

King Nebuchadnezzar II, the King of Babylon was the same king who had thrown Daniel into the lion's den, because he would not stop his praying to the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob--after his royal Master, Darius the Mede, had demanded that no prayer should be made to any other god except to him, Darius, for the next 30 days; a demand that Daniel could in no way, possibly obey.

King Nebuchadnezzar II, the King of Babylon, was the same king who had thrown Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego into the fiery furnace, when they refused as devout Jewish men also--to bow down and worship an image of the king.

Just as surely as God had surely delivered Daniel out of the lions' den and just as surely as God had delivered Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego out of the fiery furnace...so God fulfilled his promise to deliver his people of Judah out of Babylon, a promise that was fulfilled 70 years later in 537 BC.

During Advent Season, the Church on earth looks back to that great saving event, to become reminded ourselves that we too, who are looking forward to one day entering the Promised Land of heaven, are presently strangers, pilgrims and exiles upon this earth! This is why we still sing that ancient Jewish song still today:

**O Come, O Come Emmanuel and ransom captive Israel!
That mourns in lonely exile here; until the Son of God appears!**

(2) BUT THE SEASON OF ADVENT ACTUALLY TAKES US MUCH FURTHER BACK IN THE HISTORY OF GOD'S PEOPLE; LONG BEFORE 607 BC WHEN THE ISRAELITES WERE CAPTURED; LONG BEFORE THE YEAR 537 BC WHEN THEY WERE SET FREE. The season of Advent is designed to take us all the way back to the DAWN OF CREATION--reminding us that already in

the Garden of Eden, when Adam and Eve, our first parents had rebelled against God, by succumbing to the beguiling lies of the serpent.

“Did God say you couldn’t eat of any of the trees of the garden?”

“No,” the woman replied initially and correctly. “We can eat of any three except of that tree at the center of the Garden--the tree of the knowledge of Good and Evil.”

And then the devil cast evil dispersions upon the Word of God, saying: *“Oh, that won’t really happen... God just knows that the day you eat of the fruit of that tree--then you will have your eyes opened, you will be like God; and being like God...among other things you will now know the difference between good and evil.*

It was a lie. It was a vicious and tempting lie given to our first parents in Eden by him whom Jesus said one day, in talking to the Pharisees, as recorded in John 8:44: “Is the father of all lies, and a murderer from the beginning!”

But already then, God promised our first parents in Paradise a Savior, saying to the serpent with respect to Eve: *“And I will put enmity between you and the woman; and between your offspring and her offspring! He (the Promised Messiah) will crush your head,” meaning through the Savior’s destruction of the power of sin to dominate human beings’ lies, while you will strike his heel” (Genesis 3:15)!*

This is why Dr. Luther also wrote his Advent hymn we sang as our opening hymn today:

**Savior of the nations, come! Show yourself the Virgin’s Son!
Marvel, heaven, wonder earth--that our God chose such a birth!**

**No man’s power of mind or blood, but the Spirit of our God,
Made the Word of God be flesh--woman’s Offspring, Pure and Best!**

**God the Father was his source! Back to God he ran his course!
Into hell, his road went down! BACK THEN TO HIS THRONE AND CROWN!**

But ST MARK REMINDS US IN OUR GOSPEL LESSON TODAY—THAT JUST AS SERIOUSLY AND INTENTLY AS ADVENT INVITES ALL TO LOOK BACKWARDS TO THAT TIME WHEN THE JEWISH PEOPLE HAD BEEN TAKEN AS POLITICAL EXILES IN THE LAND OF BABYLON, AND TO LOOK ALL THE WAY BACK TO THE DAWN OF CREATION--WHEN THE DEVIL CONVINCED OUR FIRST PARENTS THAT THEY COULD BECOME JUST AS KNOWLEDGE AS THE LORD GOD ALMIGHTY HIMSELF--SHOULD THEY PARTAKE OF THE FORBIDDEN FRUIT--SOMETHING HE EXPRESSLY COMMANDED THEM NOT TO DO--SIMILARILY THE SEASON OF ADVENT INVITE US TO LOOK BOLDY ALSO, INTO THE FUTURE! Perhaps the most beautiful Advent/Christmas Hymn of all is that one to which the words go like this:

**Of the Father’s love begotten; ere the worlds began to be;
He is Alpha and Omega; he the Source; the Ending he!**

This is the song of Advent that reminds us that what happened at the beginning and what will happen at the end are mysteriously related to what happened at that first Christmas. It says that you and I are not merely looking upon a tender, human scene. Much more insightfully, you and I are getting a glimpse of the very nature of things. You and I are now being given an opportunity to see eternity in a manger: *“He the Source; the Ending He!”*

Christ comes among us in fulfillment of 400 different prophecies that are spoken of in the Old Testament--of which we will hear one of those as our Old Testament lesson today and for the next three weeks. Just listen to our Old Testament Lesson today from Isaiah 64:1-2. Here the

Prophet Isaiah calls out to God on behalf of God's people: *"Oh that you would rend the heavens and come down, that the mountains might quake at your presence—as when fire kindles brushwood and the fire causes water to boil—to make your name know to your adversaries and that the nations might tremble at your presence"* (Isaiah 64:1-2)!

And the cry of the Church in response to Isaiah's tremendous request is: "He has! God has! The Holy Son of God has indeed rent the heavens and come down among!"

As St Paul so beautifully summarizes the story of Christmas for us in a beautiful little letter that he wrote to a young pastor named Titus one day, who had been converted to the Christian faith, by the Spirit's power; although Titus was a Gentile. Here Paul writes: *"When the goodness and the loving-kindness of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that being justified by his grace, we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life"* (Titus 3:4-7)!

Brothers and sisters, I want you to know that it is much easier for me to stand up here and read the words of this Gospel lesson out loud to you today in 2017 that it was for me 30 years ago 1987 when I was only 32 years old myself. I was much younger then. I was just beginning my life back then with respect to being married and being blessed with two children--one who was 3 years old and one who had just been born eight months earlier!

The last thing I wanted to even think about, much less talk about back then were these words of Jesus in our Gospel lesson today, words that he spoke to his disciples shortly before his death and resurrection--about this world as we currently know it one day coming to a decisive end.

JESUS' PROMISE, HOWEVER, AND THE PROMISE THAT GOD OUR HEAVENLY FATHER BRINGS TO US THROUGH JESUS--IS THAT NO MATTER HOW HOPELESS OUR SITUATION IN LIFE APPEARS TO BE--JESUS ALONE CAN SUPPLY US WITH NEW HOPE FOR TOMORROW--IN THE MIDST OF ALL OF OUR HOPELESSNESS AND DESPAIR!

Today our Gospel lesson focuses our attention upon the "end times" as it is taken from the 13th chapter of St Mark, the passage that is sometimes called by theologians as "the little apocalypse," where the word apocalypse means the "unveiling," or the uncovering of some great piece of art like a sculpture or a picture that has been painted with oil paints upon canvas by the expert artist's magnificent swirls of a brush!

The 13th chapter of St Marks Gospel is very much like the Reader's Digest version of the apocalypse of John, what is known as the last book of the Bible—the Book of Revelations—filled with signs in the heavens and tribulation on earth. It's all there, very much in the form of a summary in Mark 13th today! But the chapter concludes with these words: "But concerning that day or that hour, no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father! "And what I say to you, I say to all: 'Watch'" (v. 37)! This are disconcerting signs, alright! And we aren't sure if Jesus was speaking to us literally here or perhaps even figuratively. In the words of Elvis Presley it will be a time when people are without a doubt: ALL SHOOK UP!

The next time that somebody confronts you with Biblical visions of the end and ties them to current events, remember this passage: "No one knows!" These prophecies given by Jesus in Mark's Gospel were tied to the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem. And although the temple was destroyed in 70 AD; nothing of real international significance happened at that time.

The prophecies in the Book of Revelation and in Mark 13 were tied to the Millennium, 1000 AD—but 1000 AD came and nothing happened! And it wasn't that long ago, was it, that many of us who were fortunate enough to be physically alive in this world—in what was dreaded by some

people to be “Y2K” the year 2000 took place—nothing of any gigantic significance took place! Once again, it seemed, as if nothing happened!

The End, the Judgment Day, if you please, the Kingdom of God—will be ushered in among us only when our God says it is time for that to happen... But as to when? GOD ONLY KNOWS!

Until then, you and I are being called upon by God to continue to live as people of faith in this world! This is the message of Advent. The End, the Judgment, the Kingdom of God will come—among us in all of its fullness—but only WHEN GOD IS READY, NOT WHEN WE ARE READY, BUT ONLY WHEN HE IS READY!

Waiting is sometimes one of the hardest things that any of us ever do in life; especially when we are waiting for a miserable chapter in our lives to close, and a new chapter that will bring peace and joy into our lives, once again, to dawn on our horizon!

Brothers and sisters, we are living at a time when many, many people—at home and abroad—are greatly troubled, and growing more deeply troubled all the time!

We are a people, whose national and international problems are simply boiling over in an increasingly-hot cauldron of fear and anxiety concerning things that are yet to be.

This past Tuesday, North Korea launched an intercontinental ballistic missile, the regime’s first rocket launch since September. And news reports confirm that President Trump was briefed on this while the “missile was still in the air!

The Japanese government said that the rocket flew for about 50 minutes and landed in the sea in its economic zone; according to media reports in Japan, while a North Korean missile fired in August was airborne for only 14 minutes.

Just since this past June, only 5 months ago, there have been 6 more terrorists’ attacks that have taken place here in the USA.

June 14 – Alexandria, VA; there was a shooting attack targeting Republican lawmakers at a baseball field; 5 men were injured, including U.S. Representative Steve Scalise and 1 police officer was attacked and shot to death.

On August 12 – There was a vehicular attack on protesters in Charlottesville, Va.

On September 24—There was another shooting attack on a church service in Antioch, Tennessee.

On Oct 1 – in Las Vegas there was a sniper attack on an outdoor concert there, 1 police officer and 2 Canadians were killed; before the attacked killed himself.

On Oct 31 -- In New York City, there was an attacker who drove a vehicle into people on a bike path, killing 8 people, then drove into a school bus; injuring 2 adults and 2 children.

On Nov 5 – In Sutherland Springs, Texas, there was an attack on a Baptist Church there; casualties included 9 children and there were 4 other children injured; the attacker was shot who later killed himself.

The finger of blame is being appointed at statesmen in our government for their inappropriate approach to women; two of the most respected broad journalists in television, Charlie Rose and Matt Lauer were abruptly fired by CBS and NBC.

Still today—in our relationship—to that time that will signify the end of the world as we know it today—our situation always has been—and continues to be today—a time of waiting! We can’t do anything about it! The End, the Judgment Day, if you please, the Kingdom of God—will be ushered in among us only when our God says it is time for that to happen...

But as to when? GOD ONLY KNOWS!

The call of God to us is for us to stay awake! Be faithful in your daily devotional life! Attend Bible studies and participate in Worship Services as frequently as you possibly can! Receive the Lord's Supper, gladly, faithfully and joyfully!

Did you hear about a man who went to Waffle House in West Columbia, very early this past Thursday morning, only to find the staff at that restaurant completely asleep! Apparently, not just having dosed off, but completely asleep!

A Midlands man went to an area Waffle House very early in Thursday morning, November 30, and found no customers in the restaurant, and the skeleton crew sleeping. "Couldn't sleep so I went to waffle house and guess what? Everyone on shift was asleep," Alex Bowen wrote on Facebook shortly after 2 a.m.

Did he leave? Did he wake them up? Nope. The Pelion native made his own meal, snapping selfies all the way to document the caper, then took his "double Texas bacon cheese steak melt and rolled." Nobody would likely be the wiser, save for the fact Alex Bowen posted about his late-night adventure on Facebook.

The former medical sergeant with the U.S. Army is a pretty popular guy, with 909 Facebook friends, so word and shares of his Waffle House visit spread rapidly.

"I waited at the register for about 10 mins....no one came...so I made it happen," Bowen rationalized in a reply to a comment on his Facebook post.

That post included pictures of the sleeping staff member, a selfie of him frying bacon on the grill, a couple of selfies of him behind the counter and finally one more of him putting the sandwich together.

Bowen wrote he "even scraped the grill when I was done."

By 7 p.m., his original post had been shared more than 500 times and garnered more than 300 likes or reactions as well as hundreds of comments.

It helped that a Facebook friend encouraged him to make the post public, which Bowen did, then telling anyone who liked to "share away."

When asked if he paid, Bowen said no, and explained why he chose not to leave any money.

"I'm not paying if I'm cooking my own (stuff) lol...waffle house is going to have to take the loss on that one!"

Later in the feed of his Facebook post, Bowen was asked if he "stole." Unashamed, but honorable, Bowen commented on the second part of his adventure.

"No, I went back and paid for it." He even included a day-after selfie with an unenthusiastic employee pictured at the register. According to the rest of Bowen's Facebook bio, he went to Pelion High School and was an Army Combat medic for 12 years. "Now I'm a computer nerd."

He studies computer science at Midlands Technical College, while doing flooring for Pro-Source Irmo. If any of that falls through, he could have a job waiting for him as a short-order cook working the grill on the overnight shift.

Spiritually speaking Jesus says: "Stay awake!" For about that day or hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, but only the Father!" In other words, "God only knows!" AMEN