

## **Advent 1 December 3 2023**

**Isaiah 64:1-9; Psalm 80:1-7, 17-19; 1 Corinthians 1:3-9;**

**Mark 13:24-37**

Do you remember as a kid lying back and just looking up at the stars? I never do that anymore. Oh, I'll see the beauty of the moon hovering over the ridge outside of town as I drive home. Or note the sky as the sun sets. But I remember as a kid, lying on my back in the grass of the front yard and staring up at the star filled sky until it felt like I was falling up into that wide inky blackness dotted by pin pricks of light.

I remember taking the time to look at the world around me. To see in detail how the bugs clambered over the rough bark of the trees, searched until I find the birds nest with its chicks.

Advent is a season to take time to stop, look, and see what is going on around us, within us, and in the world. To sit quietly in the darkness and ponder in our hearts with Mary, what all the fuss and bother around this Christ child might mean.

It only appears once in our reading from today, but the Greek word translated as "beware" is prevalent throughout the 13<sup>th</sup> chapter of Mark. A chapter called the little Apocalypse, or Uncovering or Revelation. The root of the word translated beware, means to see. To look. To be observant. Beware! Look, Jesus says, there will be others coming who say I am the one to save you, only I can do it. Through fighting for this, destroying that, dominating them. Look, see! Jesus says. Is that really what I am about?

Beware! Look! See!

Do you take the time to truly see anymore? Or are you like me, just running your eyes past things enough to make sure you aren't going to bump into anything? I have noticed that even when I did get a human to interact with at the grocery store, I would never look at them. Never truly see them. I was bagging groceries, looking at the total, getting my cards situated. Or going through the drive-through. Being served daily bread and never looking the person providing it in the eyes.

Beware! Look! See!

But to do that, first, I have to stop. Inertia works doesn't it? In our crazy busy world of so much choice the incentive is to keep moving. Keep doing. Don't miss out. But how much do we miss because we're zooming right by it. Already looking for the next thing to do. Place to go.

What if we just stop. Be present fully in this moment in time. This place. Stop. Look. Truly look around us. Stop and look that cashier in the eyes and acknowledge her existence. To see her as a fellow human being. To be fully with her in that moment as she provides daily bread and I receive it.

Stop and see the world around us. With its beauty and wonder. The intricacies of the natural world, the beauty of the stars, the wonders of the sunset... but also the brush strokes of a painting, the framing of a photograph, the familiar wrinkles of our beloved's face or hand.

Beware! Attend, Jesus says to the disciples. Look at the things you are missing.

And. Look fully at what is in this world. For all is not sweetness and light. When we stop and consider the fullness of the world including our human impact, especially in this last year, we could easily echo the cry of the prophet Isaiah, “O that you would tear open the heavens and come down! Come down here and do something!” Or the cry of the psalmist to “restore us, O God!” Go all Home Renovation on us!

For your people are consumed by hatred and fear of those created in your very image. Are blinded by the very things that have made our life so comfortable. By our own misguided sense of what is good for us. By our own busyness attending to things that, ultimately, have nothing to do with life fuller and more abundant.

Advent is a season to stop, look, and truly see what is around is, what is within us. To pause and ponder if what drives our day is truly worth it in the long run. To awaken ourselves to God’s presence in the world. To God’s love for us. All of us.

It is a time to see, not just the Christ child in the manger. A sweet and innocent baby held close in his mother’s arms. But also, the grown man Jesus hanging on the cross. Put there by our own misunderstanding that we know better than God what is good for us. To see in Christ on the cross the truth that it will never be bombs, killing, war, destruction, domination that will gain us what we seek. Rather, it will be through love, compassion, reconciliation that true peace comes. That in him we will find life that truly is life. Life worth living.

Advent is a time to hear again the words of Paul to the church in Corinth. That God has given you grace, words, knowledge, spiritual gifts. To be reminded that God is faithful and that by God we are all called into this koinonia- this fellowship of believers that is the body of Christ. To see again the gift of this place and these

people. Imperfect humans all, but ones living with eyes wide open to see our imperfection and trusting that God in Jesus has loved us with wild abandon anyway. And that with the help of the Holy Spirit, it'll get better.

As we begin this journey of Advent, I would invite you to stop. Right now. Just stop. Put down the phone, give up thinking about the Packers game, or the shopping or decorating to do. Just stop and be fully present here, now.

To breathe. In through the nose, out through the mouth. Breathe in the life giving breath of the Holy Spirit and blow out all that other stuff. To even just for this moment, take sabbath. Slow down. Be fully present.

And now, look around you. See those who are gathered here with you. Young and old(er). Friends and not yet friends. Fellow travelers, ponderers. To truly see them. This koinonia- this fellowship of believers that is St. John Lutheran Church in Ely, IA.

Let us practice this week the discipline of seeing. To take the time to look deeply at those around us and see them, to see in them the reflection of God's own image. To slow down and ponder the wonder of God's world, given to us to steward. To see them as God in Jesus sees us, as beloved children who are fearfully and wonderfully made.

To stop, look, and see as we wait for the coming of the newborn babe and the return of the king. Jesus. Who has loved us and all the world with wild abandon. Loved us even unto death. Loved us, back into life that truly is life.

Thanks be to God.

