

The Rev. Erin Hensley
November 27, 2011
Mark 13: 24-37

Get Ready

Immediately prior to Jesus' arrest and death in the thirteenth chapter of the Gospel according to Mark, Jesus discloses some critical information to the disciples. Here they are standing before the temple, marveling at its beauty and grandeur, and Jesus gives them a reality check. He says "Look, friends, these stones are just temporary. You can not see it now, but this new creation of God will involve some major pain. You will be persecuted, the temple will be destroyed, and there will be horrific unrest in the world. Be alert, be discerning; only the Father knows when I will return. So keep awake."¹ The disciples then needed to hear that the temple was temporary, that there were greater forces at work, that there were tough decisions to be made. And we need to hear a similar message, too. We need to stay awake to remember what's really true, to pay attention to what will not pass away. We need to remember that Jesus was not just born, but that Christ will come again. And we, like the first disciples, do not know when the master of the house will return.

But the most important question is not about timing; the most important question isn't even about God. The most important question is about us. Thomas Merton makes this reality plain when he writes "What is in question is not the coming of Christ, but my own response. Am I ready?" *What is in question is not the coming of Christ, but my own response. Am I ready?*² Am I ready for Christ to come again? Am I ready for Jesus to show up in my heart, in my life, in this world? Am I ready for the risen Christ to shed some light on the poverty and pain in this world? Am I ready for Jesus to shed some light on the poverty and pain in my heart?

I don't know about you, but I am certainly not ready for this advent, for this coming of Christ. My heart is not ready for Jesus' return when I act as if the one who is coming is vengeful instead of compassionate. I forget that the One who is coming chose to be born in the muck of a cave, the smells of sheep, and the vulnerability of a child. I forget that the One who is coming set the captives free and gave sight to the blind. I am not ready because I forget that the One who is coming proclaimed good news to the poor and loved the supposedly "unlovable." I forget that the One who is coming again is the one who left his disciples the gift of the Holy Spirit and believed in them so much that he proclaimed they would do even greater works.³ I forget that the One who is coming is the same one who said "Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing"⁴ as he hung on a cross to die. I forget that the One who is coming is the one who rose from the dead. The One who invited Peter, the disciple who denied him three times, to

¹ My paraphrase of Mark 13.

² Repeated for emphasis.

³ John 14:12.

⁴ Luke 23:34

feed his sheep. The One who invited unbelieving Thomas to touch the scars on his hands and on his side. This is the Jesus who is coming again.

I am not ready for Christ to come again for another reason; my own expectations of what God wants of me get in the way. Sometimes I still do believe that God demands perfection and will accept nothing less (even though I know that's not true). Sometimes I think if I can not save myself or others, then I am not good enough and certainly not enough for God. Somehow I learned to tell myself that to be like Jesus means I am somehow supposed to be Jesus, which is impossible.

But the One who is coming demands no such thing from me or from you. The One who is coming delights in me loving God and me loving my neighbor. The One who is coming again simply longs for me to love mercy, do justice, and walk humbly with Him. The One who is coming again wants me and wants you to help the kingdom of heaven become the kingdom on earth. So you see, I am not ready for Jesus' return because I deny what God really wants-me, all of me, not perfection.

My heart is also not ready for Jesus' return because I have old wounds that I refuse to let Jesus see. I tell myself that if I simply "get over them" they will go away. Instead of going away, when left in the dark, the knots grow stronger, the roots of past hurts and present fears grown more entangled. That particular corner of the heart becomes more resistant to every being opened again. I am not ready for Jesus' return because I withhold the dark from the healing light of Christ.

What about you? Are you ready for this advent, for this coming of Jesus? Do you need a reality check for your expectations of God? What about your sense of God's expectations of you? What about places of pain? Are they getting the attention they need? In what darkness do you really need God to shed some light so you can see?

If your heart is not yet ready, there is no need to fear. The One who is coming again is love. The One who is coming again wants you-nothing more, nothing less. The One who is coming again has been to hell and back, so he can handle the darkest places. And the time is now; the season we have is Advent. This season "lasts just a short while but reminds us we are to get ready for the coming of Jesus. Jesus has been born so we are not waiting for his birth. This has happened and has disrupted and turned the world upside down. We are waiting for his coming again, when the world will be freed from violence, war, sickness, and death. This will happen in God's own time. But this advent, this coming happens to us time and time again in our lives as we age and mature." The return of Jesus will happen again and again and again. Hopefully, our hearts will be ready for such visits, so that "new birth occurs in us." This return of Jesus will happen and with prepared hearts who receive him, we will be "transformed by this incarnation."⁵

⁵ The quotes in this paragraph are from the Rev. Harriette Sturges' "Daily Cup of Good News from St. Alban's Parish" on December 13, 2010.

And with all these little advents “in that last day, when [Christ] shall come again in his glorious majesty to judge both the living and the dead, we may rise to the life immortal.”⁶

Brothers and sisters, I do not know what this return of Jesus will look like for you this Advent season, but I trust that Jesus will return. I trust that this new thing Christ would like to birth within your heart matters for your life. I trust that this new thing Christ would like to birth within your heart matters for the world. So let's get ready; our salvation is waiting. *Amen.*

⁶ From the collect for the first Sunday of Advent.