

“How the Light Gets In”

Luke 21: 25-36

First Sunday in Advent

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Christ the King Lutheran Church

November 29, 2015

Introduction

1. The birds they sang at the break of day
Start again, I heard them say
Don't dwell on what has passed away
Or what is yet to be
2. Oh, the wars, they will be fought again
The holy dove, she will be caught again.
Bought, and sold, and bought again
The dove is never free

Ring the bell that still may ring
Forget your perfect offering
There is a crack, a crack in everything
That's how the light gets in. (Leonard Cohen, “Anthem,”)

Music for reflection

Movement 1

And so we have arrived at the season of Advent. It is a time of preparation, time of waiting. For many, it's a time of reflection and introspection. It's also a time of new beginnings. Of clean slates. Of days still shortening and darkness still growing and lengthening, but also hope held out that the light will soon return, the days will soon get longer, that daybreak is coming in so many different ways. Start again.

Advent is the beginning of a new church year, a sort of re-set button we push ahead of what's one of our busiest times in the church and in life in general. We move from a celebratory mood to a more contemplative, quieter one. We move from the gospel of Mark to the gospel of Luke this year, from simply sketches of Jesus life and work to more developed narratives of his interaction with people—regular people, simple people, poor people and women and minorities and outsiders and people with storied pasts and people with secrets they're hiding and sins they're carrying. People like us.

This first day of Advent, it's like we are hanging out in those last few minutes of darkness that come before the dawn—the darkest part of the day, in many ways. We look for the light. For the places where it might show up—for the cracks that might let it in. Somehow we know it's there, we believe in the light, even if we can't quite see it, not yet. We light candles, create luminaries, even, to help light the way until... until... until the fullness of hope, peace, joy and love are revealed.

Music for reflection

Movement 2

Have you noticed—these Bible texts for the first Sunday of Advent, they tend to be a little dark. A little brooding. A little heavy. A little apocalyptic. We don't begin where most of us think we maybe should begin. No “once upon a time.” No, “in those days a degree went out.” Not even “in the bleak midwinter.” Not yet. We'll get to the beginning later. Eventually, we'll circle back to arrive at the past.

See, Advent tends to mess with our sense of time, with the tenses with which we conjugate our verbs. What was and what is and what will be is all sort of mixed up together. What time is it? What day is it? What month? What year? We start this Advent at the end—or at least near the end. Not the first chapter of Luke, certainly not the 2nd chapter, not yet; we

start Advent in chapter 21—21 out of 24. And we start this time of waiting, this time of new beginnings with a prophecy of the future from the past. Why? And do these days of future past somehow have anything to do with our present? What are they telling us how to live right now?

There will be signs in the sun, the moon, and the stars... People will faint from fear and foreboding... they will see 'the Son of Man coming in a cloud' ... that day will come upon all who live on the face of the whole earth." Be alert. Be ready. Be prepared. Don't let it catch you off guard. Keep your head up. Salvation is coming.

Music for reflection

Movement 3

I don't think I need to tell you that our world is broken. Broken in so many places. Big breaks and little ones. There are wars and rumors of war. Displaced persons. Migrants. Immigrants. Refugees. Plus all of the pundits and talking heads one might need to know all of the subtle differences between them. Terrorism on a global scale, attacking iconic, symbolic places. Sometimes even scarier, more senseless violence even closer to home, in everyday places like theaters, schools, clinics, in police stations, at peaceful protests. There are walls that divide us—literal walls on borders, at checkpoints, between neighborhoods. But also figurative walls, between generations, between cultures, the haves and the have-nots, the insiders and the outsiders, the mainstream and the minority. We build these walls, or we allow them to stay built. Sometimes they make us feel safe, protected, secure. Other times we feel trapped, left out, locked down, entombed. We know we live in a broken, fallen world. And we, too, are broken. Our hearts are broken, with hurts known only to us, family matters, health issues, you-wouldn't-understand, I don't mean to be a downer, never-mind, whatever. Even our hearts at times, feel trapped, locked down, entombed.

But even these broken places known only to us, even these cracks let in the light. And in these dark days of advent, when the sun rises so late and sets so early, when the days are still getting shorter and we need to light more and more candles against the dark, even now, these cracks in our lives, in our homes, in our world, can let the light get in. It's one of the ways we know that the kingdom of God is near. Light. Light shines. Light shines in the darkness. Light shines in the darkness and the darkness has not, will not, and cannot overcome it.

Music for reflection

Conclusion

So what are we waiting for? What are we waiting for this advent? Are we waiting for more signs? More signals? Are we waiting for a new hope—a reassuring word? Are we waiting for the future to break into our present and pull us out of our past? Are we waiting for relief? For release? For an end to division? For reconciliation and peace? Are we waiting for the trees to be up, and the candles to be lit and the poinsettias to bloom and the bells to ring and the children to sing and the elders to laugh and world in wonder to echo God's peace, Salaam, Shalom?

The days are surely coming. Light dawns on a weary world... Love grows, and hope blooms, and the promised day comes.

Music for reflection