

# Sermon Text for November 29, 2020

By Rev. Robert K. Bronkema

*Isaiah 64:1-9, Mark 13:23-37*

*“Advent and the second coming of Jesus”*

Welcome to our first Sunday in Advent together this Sunday. Advent a season when we are reminded to wait and watch for the second coming of our Savior Jesus Christ. We trust and we believe that Jesus is literally going to come back again to be with us. Advent, these next four Sundays, remind us that we are in a season of anticipation. This year as abnormal as it has been we have tried to keep as many things as normal as possible. We have decorated the church and the hallways leading into the church and when you come in. We have our families lighting the Advent candle. It is, in some sense, our defiance of our current realities to say that God has and always will have the last word. The mountains may tremble and be thrown into the sea, but God still reigns.

The sermon series in which we find ourselves is called a season in the lectionary. Like all things we know by what is happening around us what kind of season we find ourselves. At our old house on South Decatur we had these little purple crocuses which always came up first in the Spring. We knew that when we saw the crocuses that the season was changing. We have so many signs of the season around us. We know that when the corn comes down that summer is coming to an end. We know that when we see the decorations at church that Christmas is coming around the corner. There is a rhythm that we know and with which we are familiar.

Similarly, we want signs, placeholders that are visible and obvious for when Jesus is going to come back again. We don't want to have to guess. What type of signs are we to expect for when Jesus comes back again? Advent, we say, is a season of anticipation in the life of the church when we highlight the promise that Jesus is going to come back again. So both of our Scriptures encourage us to have an attitude of waiting. Isaiah uses the image of the clay, shaped and molded by the potter while we rely and trust in the Word of God that never, simply does not and cannot change. Our call in Advent, our call in the midst of this pandemic is to be the clay. Let's read.

## **READ**

As we heard the reading from Isaiah I'm wondering if you all got the sense of what was being portrayed by the prophet. He is asking that the coming of God would be a noticeable, world changing event. Verse 1 states, o that you would tear open the heavens and come down.

The author is asking God that when God comes and makes his presence felt that it would be something that every single person on the earth would recognize.

During these very chaotic and troubling times in our country there are people who feel as if we are fulfilling these prophecies from Scripture. But keep in mind, what is happening in our country pales in comparison to what happened last week in Nigeria where the military is shooting people on the street. It pales in comparison to what is happening in Belarus where thousands of young people, ages 20-30 are being rounded up and arrested because of their opposition to the government. Vladimir Tatarnikov who was our intern while we served in Russia is a Lutheran pastor in Belarus. Two weeks ago his secretary was arrested and placed in prison for no reason at all. He is afraid he might be next.

We often have a sense that what happens in this country is apocalyptic, when it is barely a blip on the screen compared to tragedies that happen globally that we often do not even notice. The coming of Jesus is going to happen, but we cannot base it upon signs and hints that we find happening around us, otherwise we might be seen as a bit foolish. In New England in 1780 an eclipse brought about panic to the citizens. There was a legislative session taking place and one lawmaker stood up and said: "Mr. Speaker, if it is not the end of the world and we adjourn, we shall appear to be fools. If it is the end of the world, I should choose to be found doing my duty. I move you sire, that candles be brought."

Some of us remember the year 2000 and how caught up people got with the simple changing of a human made calendar year, as if God would somehow base God's plans on our calendar. Nothing happened and those who were caught up in it in a religious sense, looked foolish. We expect to be able to recognize when Jesus is coming back, but beware of not tying events that are happening in our country to that coming.

Isaiah gives us good guidance this first Sunday in Advent on how we ought to anticipate the coming of God. Vs. 8 is the key verse in Isaiah for our sermon today. We read, O Lord, you are the Father, we are the clay, you are our potter, we are all the work of your hand. The changing of season is not up to us, we do not bring them about. The coming of Jesus is not up to us, we do not bring it about. This verse reminds us of the clear definition of roles. We see clearly what God's place is. God is the Father, God is the potter. We are reminded of our place. We are the clay, we are the work of the hands of God. That throws us back to Genesis when God created us out of the mud. Our roles cannot be confused and intertwined, and often we try to do that. Advent is a great time to remind ourselves of what we are called to do in this season of waiting.

I had asked a few Sundays ago for some suggestions on which book of the Bible ought we look at next after this season in the lection which will end the first week of January. Overwhelmingly you came back and said Revelation. We are not going to look at Revelation. We are going to look at Philippians next, it is called the letter of Joy. I expected a vast majority of you to suggest Revelation. Every place where I have served I have done a Bible study on Revelation simply because people in every church where I have served, and I think just people in general, want to know when will the end times be? Revelation, people think, is the key to that answer. It is not. This chapter in Mark is a mini apocalypse, so I guess I can scratch your itch this Sunday by addressing this topic.

Setting the stage for our Scripture we find in vs.3 disciples of Jesus asking him that question. We saw that same question asked in Matthew when we looked at the parables that spoke about the coming of the kingdom of God. Jesus gives some examples, he says in vs.7 that you will see wars and hear about rumors of wars. This isn't really very specific. This has been happening for the last 2,000 years. In vs.12 we read about conflict that will take place within the family: brother vs. brother, father vs. child, children vs. parents. I am grateful that over these past few year when our nation has been so divided that in my immediate family, my brothers and my mom, we have remained united and in love with each other. We don't all agree, but we are and have remained family.

But beyond my direct family, that hasn't always been the case. Over these past few years we have seen this prophecy fulfilled. People within their own families have stopped talking to each other, have cut ties off from each other. I'm sure it is not the first time in history that this has happened, but it is definitely a time in our history that this has happened. It is a current reality from which we hope to be healed. Think about your own family and I wonder if you have been affected by it, my guess is that you have. Jesus tells his disciples here to be aware that when these things happen they are a sign of sin, they are a sign that we continue to move further and further away from God. It is a sign that we are closer to the coming of Christ than we ever were.

Each Gospel provides us with a glimpse into Jesus' last words and messages to his disciples. In John we hear his last message to his disciples was to love one another, as he washes their feet. In Matthew and Luke we see his last message to his disciples was to be engaged in mission as he gives the great commission in Matthew and a similar one to it in Acts and Luke. Mark's has Jesus give his message to his disciples here in this chapter. Jesus' last command to

his disciples, to each one of us, is to watch and be ready for when I come back again to take you with me. Be ready!

We see in these verses three different times where we read this message, look at vs.23: Be alert because I have told you now everything you need to know. Vs.33: Beware, keep alert because you don't know when this will happen. Lastly in vs.37: what I say to you all, keep awake. Our second example, where he says beware, keep alert, many manuscripts have Jesus saying: Keep alert and pray. Where else in the Bible do we find Jesus telling his disciples to keep alert and pray. Remember the garden of Gethsemane when he is asking his disciples, just stay awake and pray with me. Three times he asks them, and each time they fall asleep.

This Advent season we are reminded by Isaiah that we are the clay and we are to keep alert for the potter will have a task for us to do. Mark tells us the same thing, but he provides a word of encouragement for us in case we lose hope. Look at vs.31 where we read: The world will be turned upside down, things will happen that you cannot explain and that you have never seen, but the Word of the Lord will remain forever, unchangeable, fixed, forever.

How do we wait and be the clay, we immerse ourselves in Scripture which never ever changes. We can't start making our game plan for the future upon our own. If we do not look to Scripture and the guidance of the Holy Spirit especially in these times, then we are doomed to try to take the initiative outside of God's will. As society around us is in an upheaval, it is important to that which is constant. That which is constant is God's word. We have seen society in an upheaval in the past. Maybe the 1960's taught us from God's Word that God created all of us out of the same mud, not matter who we are. I'm thinking the 2020's were meant to teach us from God's word that we are commanded to love our neighbor and that command should never waver.

As we hear in Scripture and on the radio, the times they are a changing. To every thing there is a season under heaven. Advent today reminds us to wait, to stay alert, don't try to force God or to tempt God with our actions. Advent reminds us to watch for Jesus' coming in a way that trusts his unchanging Word and we reflect the attitude of the clay. Malleable, flexible, in love with the Potter. Amen.