

Advent 1 November 29, 2020

Isaiah 64:1-9

Mark 13:24-37

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“Jesus may come in the morning; Jesus may come at noon; Jesus may come in the evening, so keep your heart in tune...”

This was part of a song that a visiting pastor taught us during confirmation camp when I was a teenager. Every year when we hear what might be called the ‘apocalyptic’ or fulfillment Gospel readings, that tune comes into my head.

Just as a refresher, over the last few Sundays we heard the parables of the wise and foolish bridesmaids; the servants left in charge of the master’s wealth; and the sheep and the goats. Today, as we begin this Advent season, there’s no John the Baptist, Mary, Joseph, or angels; instead we hear Jesus tell about cosmic changes with the sun and moon and about another master who goes away after commanding watchfulness: “Keep awake!” And to top it off, the prophet Isaiah shouts an anguished cry: “O that you would tear open the heavens, God, and come down!”

These scripture passages might seem to be oh, so 2020--a year of challenge and grief and anxious watchfulness. And yet Advent is a season of hope, isn’t it; and a time of deep longing, not of fear--that longing we feel for peace, love, and wholeness. Maybe especially this year we long for the One who will be birthed in that Bethlehem stable. We long to hold onto and be held by the promise of Jesus’ coming in history, mystery, and majesty.

In *history*, because Christ did enter our world in a specific time and place. In *mystery*, because Christ’s presence is with us now when we worship and when we are alone; when we receive bread and wine; in times of sorrow and times of joy. In *majesty*, because one day, someday, all we long for will be fulfilled, and our fractured world will know healing.

And so, the song says “keep your heart in tune.” I have a feeling that rather than the balm we need right now, we could come away from this time of worship with a greater burden of needing to get our act together or clean ourselves up to make sure

we are somehow living up to Jesus' expectations. But what if being awake or alert in these days is not another weight to carry, but an invitation to be 'in tune' with what Jesus has done and is doing in our world?

What do you suppose that tune sounds like? If we think about Jesus' ministry, we might imagine music that expresses love, service, forgiveness, and acceptance of all people. But we also might imagine an unsettling tune that challenges complacency, injustice, violence, and power for power's sake. Jesus embodied all these things in his life, death, and resurrection; and invites us to share in the mission that continues.

So often, it's hard to hear the 'music' of Christ in our world. There's such a cacophony of sound and events each day, isn't there? We've just come through a fractious election that has continued the splintering of our country; COVID news cycles every day and is still so difficult to absorb; the cries for justice that we heard this summer are continuing; and for many of us, to not be able to have the grounding we receive from worshipping/gathering together has left a hole in our lives. This constant churn can become so overwhelming sometimes that we just shut ourselves down and plug our ears so as to not have to listen *any more*. "Keep awake!" Jesus says, but sometimes it's just too much.

We especially seem to have a hard time not forgetting those in our world who are suffering. My daughter's in-laws are going on a mission trip to Haiti next year, and when I first heard it, I actually had to think "Oh, right--earthquake they still haven't recovered from, hurricanes, poverty--right." What about the children at the border? Those in countries that are now facing COVID-induced famine? Or our Palestinian brothers and sisters, some who live in Jesus' birthplace of Bethlehem, who live with violence, oppression, and a wall that separates them from the rest of Israel. Freedom, access to health care, land and housing are all denied them in this land we refer to as "Holy."

In these Advent weeks ahead, the geography of Israel will play such a role in the scriptures surrounding Jesus' birth. The river Jordan, Bethlehem, the hill country, Jerusalem, Nazareth...I urge us to be "in tune" with these names and places--look at a map from Jesus' day...and then challenge ourselves to discover and learn what

is happening there today. Listen to the cries for justice and peace and hear Jesus' words that invite us to be aware of the world and all the people God created. Wait...watch...keep awake...hear the steady beat of Christ's heart longing to be 'in tune' with us--with you.

This season is filled to the brim with hope and promise--Emmanuel, 'God with us' has come, is coming, and will come again. Amidst all that is different, all we are struggling with, and all that has changed this year, that promise remains. Do you hear the song of love that Emmanuel sings--from stable to cross to empty tomb to this moment?