

“Dig-In for the Long Haul”

Message by DD Adams

Providence United Methodist Church

First Sunday of Advent

November 30, 2014

The epistle lesson for today is taken from the Book of 1 Corinthians, chapter 1, verses 3 through 9. I'll be reading from the New Revised Standard Version. Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. I give thanks to my God always for you because of the grace of God that has been given you in Christ Jesus, for in every way you have been enriched in him, in speech and knowledge of every kind—just as the testimony of Christ has been strengthened among you—so that you are not lacking in any spiritual gift as you wait for the revealing of our Lord Jesus Christ. He will also strengthen you to the end, so that you may be blameless on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. God is faithful; by him you were called into the fellowship of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.

The gospel lesson is from the Book of Mark, chapter 13, verses 24 through 37. But in those days, after that suffering, the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will be falling from heaven, and the powers in the heavens will be shaken. Then they will see the Human One coming in clouds with great power and glory. Then he will send out the angels, and gather his elect from the four winds, from the ends of the earth to the ends of heaven.

‘From the fig tree learn its lesson: as soon as its branch becomes tender and puts forth its leaves, you know that summer is near. So also, when you see these things taking place, you know that he is near, at the very gates. Truly I tell you, this generation will not pass away until all these things have taken place. Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.

‘But about that day or hour no one knows, neither the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. Beware, keep alert; for you do not know when the time will come. It is like a man going on a journey, when he leaves home and puts his slaves in charge, each with his work, and commands the doorkeeper to be on the watch. Therefore, keep awake—for you do not know when the master of the house will come, in the evening, or at midnight, or at cockcrow, or at dawn, or else he may find you asleep when he comes suddenly. And what I say to you I say to all: Keep awake.’ This is God’s word for God’s people. Thanks be to God. God grant understanding to the hearing of your word. Amen.

The Gospel text we read from the book of Mark is not exactly what we expect to hear on the first Sunday of Advent. When the Bible starts talking about the sun being darkened, the moon not giving its light, and the stars falling from heaven we want to curl up in a ball and think about pleasant things Things like snowflakes, children opening Christmas presents, or how great that turkey and ham will taste. We want to leave the sanctuary with a warm fuzzy feeling inside that all is well. Deep down we know that the world is in a chaotic and violent mess. It causes people to simply not *want* to know what the channel 4 anchor people is saying about global economy or how many people feel trapped financially nowadays. However, the second coming of Jesus is a reality. The verses in Mark make us understand our need to give thanks despite our conditions and the world’s messiness.

Remember when you were little and how you would dream about how wonderful Christmas morning was going to be? You dreamt about what was in that big package. You stared at it and shook it. You got excited thinking about the turkey and stuffing and how great it would taste. But then as Christmas morning went by, and all the presents had been opened, there was this nagging emptiness inside. You thought to yourself, “Gee, that went quick. I wish I would’ve gotten

that new car I wanted. Or, I'm so full I'm half sick from eating so much." The day just wasn't what you thought it would be. We can overdramatize the day, and then when it's over, we wonder why we'd built it up so much in our minds.

The verses in Mark's gospel we read are real. They cut through any sentimentality we might have around Christmas. The sun being darkened, the moon not giving its light, and the stars falling from heaven is talking about the end of the world as we've known it. We go Christmas shopping and hear "A Little Town of Bethlehem" playing on the speakers at Macy's, but after reading this in the Bible it brings our unrealistic expectations to a screaming halt.

Let's go back to the beginning of chapter thirteen and take a look at what the *disciples thought* to get a better understanding. You could say we're in-between Advents—just as they were in the first century. We're between the first coming of the baby Jesus and the Second Coming of Christ. At the start of chapter 13, the disciples are captivated by the largeness and magnificence of the Jerusalem temple. They say, "Look, Teacher, what large stones and what large buildings!" Jesus responds and says "Do you see these great buildings? Not one stone will be left here upon another; all will be thrown down."

Then Jesus talks about how the temple will be profaned. They'll be tribulations, false messiahs and prophets. Jesus is saying that the temple will no longer be the location of God. We're still faced with the same question the first century believers were faced with. Where are you going to find God during this tumultuous time in the world? Will we bury our head in the sand? Can we ignore the times? Where will we look and find God during this Advent season?

God is a God of hope. In the verses we read there's an anticipation of wonder and thanksgiving about the coming of "the day of our Lord Jesus Christ." The gifts that God has poured out say we're not lacking in any spiritual gift and that God will strengthen us to the end. God is faithful. God can be trusted.

All that God has provided is more than sufficient for the in-betweenness of the two Advents. In the Body of Christ we have no lack of spiritual gifts to carry us to the end. All we need is to keep alert and remain watchful. Only God knows the day and the hour. In earlier times people practiced a time of examining their conscience. They would assess their behavior at the end of the day to see if they were really holding true to the faith. *Learning to be faithful just doesn't happen—it's prayed over, practiced, and lived out on a daily basis.*

In the Corinthian passage, the lesson we take from the fig tree is the speed she ripens her fruit and feels the warmth of summer. The lesson for us is as soon as we perceive the signs of Christ's coming; we're to learn that Christ is close at hand. And what are the signs of his coming? Changes on earth and in heaven, but the changes don't tell us when, but we do know that the signs are an indication of his soon return. So be on guard. Keep your hearts prepared. Keep awake and continue in your faithfulness! We need to dig-in for the long haul. We're to live our lives prepared and expecting Christ's return at any moment, and to be ready at any time. Let's be ready.

Let's pray. Holy God who stands alone in authority, we anxiously await your return. Keep us alert and ready with our lamps filled with oil and our hearts burning with desire to be with you in eternity. In Christ's name we pray. Amen.