

Sermon for the First Sunday of Advent, December 3, 2017 - "Tear Open the Heavens and Come!"

First Sunday of Advent
December 3, 2017
Good Shepherd Lutheran Church
Decorah, Iowa
Rev. Amy Zalk Larson

[Click here to read scripture passages for the day.](#)

Tear Open the Heavens and Come!

Beloved of God, grace to you and peace in the name of Jesus.

The scriptures during the season of Advent always sound a little jarring amidst the sounds of the holiday season. But this week, these scriptures about endings and devastating events also feel pretty appropriate for where we are as a community. In this year of so many losses, this week has been particularly difficult. And the news in our nation and our world is so painful as well. Someone who stopped by church on Wednesday said to me, "It sure doesn't feel like the most wonderful time of the year does it?"

This week, the lament in our Isaiah reading seems like a more appropriate sentiment, "O that you would tear open the heavens and come down." O that you would come and do something, O God, do something about the pain of the world.

This year, it's especially good that we have this time of Advent to focus on how God does come down in Christ Jesus. The word "Advent" comes from the Latin word that means "coming" and in Advent, we focus on the three ways that Christ comes to us. We prepare for Christ to be born again among us and reflect on what it means that God comes to us in the flesh. We reflect on how Christ comes to us here and now in daily life, in word and sacrament and the gathered community. And, we prepare for Christ to come again, at the end of time, to make all things new.

The texts for the first Sunday of Advent focus on Christ coming again at the end of time. And all the talk about the end times is always a little jarring as Advent is beginning and as the holiday season is beginning. Why are we starting the season with an ending?

But as author Jan Richardson articulates beautifully in her "Blessing When the World is Ending":

Look, the world
is always ending
somewhere.

Somewhere
the sun has come
crashing down.

Somewhere
it has gone
completely dark.

Somewhere
it has ended
with the gun,
the knife,
the fist.

Somewhere
it has ended
with the slammed door,
the shattered hope.

Somewhere
it has ended
with the utter quiet
that follows the news
from the phone,
the television,
the hospital room.

Somewhere
it has ended
with a tenderness
that will break
your heart.

Richardson explains,
“The endings in one’s personal world are not the same, I know, as The End of the World that Jesus describes [in the 13th chapter of Mark]. Yet the first Sunday of Advent invites us to recognize that these endings are connected; that the Christ who will return at the end of time somehow inhabits each ending we experience in this life. [We’re invited] to look for the presence of Christ who enters into our every loss, who comes to us in the midst of devastation, who gathers us up when our world has shattered, and who offers the healing that is a foretaste of the wholeness he is working to bring about not only at the end of time but also in this time, in this place.” (Blessing When the Word is Ending for Advent 1B at adventdoor.com/2014/11/23/advent-1-blessing-when-the-world-is-ending/)

The good news of Advent is that Christ has come, does come and will come again into every moment of our lives - beginnings, endings, joyful holidays, painful holidays and gray Tuesday mornings. God has heard our laments, “O that you would tear open the heavens and come down, O come and do something O God,” God has come down in the flesh, in Jesus.

And According to the Gospel of Mark, when Jesus was baptized, the heavens **were torn open** and the Spirit descended like a dove. In Jesus, God tore open the heavens and came down - tore open what separates God from us. In Jesus, God entered all the sin, suffering and death of our lives so that none of that can separate us from God, either. Then Jesus rose from the dead to be everywhere present with God

and with us. The ending of his life was a beginning, a beginning of a new way for Jesus to be present with us.

This means that the Jesus who was born long ago still comes to us again and again in our daily life. Jesus is present in every loss, in all the devastation, goodness, drudgery and joy of our world, in every part of our life. Jesus is present as we hear his word, as we share in his body and blood, as we gather as a community. Jesus assures us that we are not alone, that he is with us. Jesus is at work in all of this to bring healing, wholeness and new life.

Jesus has come and does still come to us now. With that assurance, we can trust that Christ's coming again at the end of time is also good news; it is something we can anticipate with hope.

With this assurance, we can face every ending in our lives and in our world with hope, looking for the signs of Christ's presence, trusting that every ending is also a beginning.

God, in Christ Jesus, has torn open the heavens and come down.

Christ comes to us still and Christ will come again.

This is the most wonderful news of all for this time of year and for all time.

Thanks be to God.