

Today's Gospel is known as Mark's "little apocalypse" and many biblical commentators state that this is the time to invite a guest preacher to preach because no pastor wants to tackle this very difficult text they say. ...

....So ...here I am...preaching...THANK YOU PASTORS!!

**Time:**

I grew up with an old faded newspaper clipping posted to the fridge. Every morning I would stare at it and read it. I practically had the article memorized, but I still stood there in *fascination every morning*. It was an article about some NASA engineers finding a lost day in time through the stories of the Bible.

Their mathematical equations needed to be precise for the space flight of Apollo, and yet they couldn't account for 24 hours from the past to predict the future alignments of spacial elements for the flight path to be determined for Apollo. Well, it so happened that one of the engineers remembered some of his Sunday School lessons, and it was through those biblical stories where God's divine hand

- 1) held time still for battle for Joshua and then
- 2) turned time backwards for a sign of healing for Hezekiah,

that the unaccounted day was officially found by the NASA engineers. Or at least that's what the faded news article on the fridge said.

➔ That "real proof" of God's hand in time was very influential for me..... Especially as a child which desired proof of God...scientific proof.

Maybe as a child I needed to find comfort in knowing that God had a hand on time; even a hand in my very own time. Growing up in a domestically violent household I wanted to know that someone else was in charge other than the craziness which surrounded me. Where there seemed to be a lack of control in daily life, I needed to know that there was someone in the universe who had ultimate control. I think that's why I stared at that article every morning. In the midst of darkness and suffering, even as a child, I wanted to have someone in control of time. Someone who might move the clocks for me so that this time of suffering would pass more quickly, or stop, or be reversed maybe. If God could meet God's people in time in the past, couldn't God meet me in my time of need too?

Maybe you've had moments like that too...Where waiting for time to change is difficult. Waiting....it's a hard thing to do.

Today's text is apocalyptic because it speaks of suffering, of a time of cosmic destruction and ending, where there is no longer light in our world....and in all that, there is a coming of Christ.

However, this “apocalyptic” text lacks one of the most important aspects we have a tendency to associate with apocalyptic texts: **judgment**. **BUT.....There is no judgment in this text. None.**

- There will be suffering. Yes.
- There will be a time of darkness in our world as we’ve never encountered before. Yes.
- And in that darkness, Christ will come. Yes.

But Christ comes not to judge ...but rather Christ comes to gather God’s people!!!

....To seek them out and gather them from all the corners of the world.

**This is not a text meant to be scary but rather of gracious gathering!**

Of Christ coming in the darkness and finding us! Seeking us out, no matter where we are lost in the darkness....Christ is coming for us!

Now I don’t know about you, but to me....that’s Good News!

No, this text is not about judgment! This text is about a God who comes through the suffering and the dark times in our lives and in our world, and claims us and gathers us in. **A God that seeks after the scattered.**

As we start Advent, the “New Year of the church calendar,” we turn to what is coming. Today is essentially the New Year’s Day of the church year...think about that; New Year’s Day.....the start to a new year: A time for new resolutions, new beginnings, new starts, a looking forward towards what is coming in the new year.

**Advent, “advancing,” what’s coming, adventus in Latin; to come.**

This apocalyptic Gospel text speaks of Christ’s second advent, Christ’s second coming.

We are preparing for Christmas right now, the celebration of Christ’s first coming, of Christ’s first Advent- God coming as a fragile and vulnerable baby, coming as a king, to provide our salvation on a dark and suffering cross.

We wait in anticipation for Christmas because of the new beginning we get when God incarnate comes to live and spend time with us.

But we must wait....We wait for God’s time to come in God’s own time.

I think this apocalyptic text is also telling us to wait in such excited anticipation for Christ’s second advent too. Not in fear of judgment, but in excited anticipation which keeps us awake and alert.

Apocalypse means to “reveal” ...the revealing of God’s self. When God revealed God’s self as a baby, it changed everything. When God revealed God’s love for us, through the cross, it changed everything. When God incarnate entered into our time, it changed everything forever.

Nothing has been the same since. When God enters into our time it disrupts us, displaces us, and even disorientates us.

➔ I'm one of those "light sleepers"- or some might call "stress sleepers" where I can't sleep the night before something big. Maybe it's the first day of school, or first day on the job, or a big trip, or a surgery, or graduation or an interview...or maybe it's when preaching on a really difficult text...I can't sleep. You know the type, where you wake up every hour even without an alarm clock, or simply where the excitement or stress just plainly keeps you awake all night long. ....You know it...right?

Waiting is hard...

What if we waited for the advent of Christ with such anticipation? What would that look like? We see a glimpse of it in our children for Christmas morning to come with their wiggles and squirms of excitement. The excited song of "Santa Claus is coming to town" ....what would it do if we changed it to "Jesus Christ is coming to town?"

Yes, we cannot physically stay awake 24-7. But what if we were more awake to the scattered world around us? What if we were more alert to those in suffering and in the depths of darkness? What if we were more awake to our own vulnerability and needs too?

We each have experienced our own personal mini apocalypses. Our own "ends of the world as we know it." Our own times where our world seems to have gone dark, without any sunshine, or moon or stars...where there seems to be no time at all to orient ourselves. The suffering so immense that time is not on our side it seems....

Moments where we hoped for more time with a loved one who has died. For time to slow down so our children won't grow up so fast. Time to re-live precious moments of love and joy again and again. To recreate a moment in time, so that we could have a chance to redo it differently. How often we wish to change time. Because if we could change time...then maybe we'd be more ready. We wouldn't be disoriented and so scattered maybe. But can we ever fully be ready for the disorientation which God does when entering into our time...?

The Gospel urges us to be awake and ready. But we can never be fully ready for Christ's coming.

We have our brokenness, our humanity, our pain and loss, and our love, joy and longings too. And God comes bursting into it all despite our lack of readiness and meets us there right in the middle of our time of both needs and joys.

Christ comes. Christ is coming.

Christ comes in the promise of new beginnings and of new life in the waters of baptism, and in the bread and wine. Christ comes in our darkest hours of suffering because Christ understands abandonment on a cross.

We often encounter Christ coming and gathering up our scattered lives in our darkest moments, **but God is there in all time**. God is there at the birth of a child and the spark of love, in the longing of healed relationships, and the agony of a loss.

**Advent-> Coming .... Apocalypse -> Revealing**

**God reveals God's self in the coming of Christ.**

Christ will come in spite of the suffering and darkness of our world being ready or not. When everything we know seems shaken and scattered, darkened and without orientation; Christ comes.

And Christ comes again and again and again!...every year!....every Advent!, every Christmas!....every Meal!...even every hour!

Because Christ's coming is not determined by our time, **but** - our time **is** changed forever because of Christ's coming.

In your moments of being scattered, may you know the hope of Christ coming to gather you up.

In the times of darkness, may you see God being revealed to you.

And in the beauty of waiting, may God provide us with a new year in Christ.