

First Sunday of Advent (year C) December 1, 2024

INTRODUCTION OF THEMES FOR THE DAY AND SEASON

Advent is about waiting...The teacher, therapist, Priest and writer Henri Nouwen insists that advent waiting isn't passive...it's expectant knowing God is doing things now and bits of the future are already taking shape among us and within us. Advent calls us to the work of paying attention and noticing.

PRAYER OF THE DAY

Stir up your power, Lord Christ, and come. By your merciful protection alert us to the threatening dangers of our sins and redeem us for your life of justice, for you live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

GOSPEL Luke 21:25-36 New Revised Standard Version Updated Edition

The Coming of the Son of Man

25 "There will be signs in the sun, the moon, and the stars and on the earth distress among nations confused by the roaring of the sea and the waves. **26** People will faint from fear and foreboding of what is coming upon the world, for the powers of the heavens will be shaken. **27** Then they will see 'the Son of Man coming in a cloud 'with power and great glory. **28** Now when these things begin to take place, stand up and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near."[\[a\]](#)

The Lesson of the Fig Tree

29 Then he told them a parable: "Look at the fig tree and all the trees; **30** as soon as they sprout leaves you can see for yourselves and know that summer is already near. **31** So also, when you see these things taking place, you know that the kingdom of God is near. **32** Truly I tell you, this generation will not pass away until all things have taken place. **33** Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.

Exhortation to Watch

34 “Be on guard so that your hearts are not weighed down with dissipation and drunkenness and the worries of this life and that day does not catch you unexpectedly, **35** like a trap. For it will come upon all who live on the face of the whole earth. **36** Be alert at all times, praying that you may have the strength to escape all these things that will take place and to stand before the Son of Man.”

SERMON

A friend talks about dreaming about taking the final exam for a class never attended—This recently-retired a university professor laughs when she acknowledges her undergrad days are long past yet she still has the nightmare. Some thirty-five years since I last spun a record or cracked a mic, I have this nightmare where I am working at a radio station...when we actually played vinyl records... and for some reason all the albums in the station have gone AWOL the dreaded silence called “dead air” oppresses while I frantically search in vain for record—even a discarded promo ‘45 by the Bay City Rollers would do in a pinch! Dream interpreters say we have these dreams when we feel un prepared.

Advent imposes a paradox. We say, “stay awake”. We also say “slow down”. So which dictum do we follow. Maybe a story will suggest something about the both/and approach we might take. Friends of ours raised their daughters to be what they called “noticers” to pay attention. Vacations were about spotting unusual details. Daily life was devoted to paying close attention. That takes focus and effort. It also requires slowing down enough to see what’s unfolding.

There is a story told about a pilgrim visiting a Buddhist monk and talking about prayer and meditation. As the pilgrim pontificated about prayer, the monk poured tea into a tea bowl. More prattle, more pouring. The bowl overflows and tea spills onto the floor. The splashing interrupted the pilgrim’s soliloquy long enough for him to ask the monk, “Hey, what gives?” Now the teachable moment...Where is

room for anything new when we are already so full of our own thoughts and preoccupations?

I invite you to sit quietly with a couple of questions—

What things fill your life's tea bowl to where you can't take in another thing?

What do you seek in this season of your life?

Where do you experience the Holy...or God in your life?

Maybe you would like to brew a nice cup of tea this week...pour the water slowly, and as you drink, hold the liquid in your mouth for an instant longer than usual, swallow slowly and notice how the tea feels as you swallow. Then think a bit more about the story of the overflowing tea bowl and the things that seem to crowd our lives and the things we'd like to really see and experience.

Watch. Wait. Wonder, even. Can you notice where God is showing up?

Amen.