

First Sunday of Advent (C)

December 2, 2012

Today we begin a new liturgical year and enter into the rich and ancient four-*/-+ week season of Advent. All three of the readings this Sunday are messages of encouragement and future hope. Throughout the Scriptures, God is telling us over and over again: "Be not afraid."

"Fear not!" God tells Abraham. "I am your shield." "Fear not," God tells Isaiah. "I have called you by name: you are mine." "Do not be afraid," the angels tell the shepherds. "For today in the city of David a savior has been born for you who is Messiah and Lord." Do not be afraid!" the Easter angel proclaims, "I know that you are seeking Jesus the crucified. He is not here, for he has been raised just as he said."

On this First Sunday of Advent, Jesus knows his disciples are afraid. In Luke's Gospel Jesus speaks these words of the end time just before his own end time, which was to take place in a fearful place indeed, the place of the skull, Golgotha. And so Jesus knows something about the fear and dread that grip our souls.

Today we begin Advent, the church's lovely season of quiet and peace that precedes the coming of Jesus the Christ at Christmas and the coming of the King of kings at the end of the world. But as all of us know, there are many people, events, and things that will rob us of our Advent waiting, that will fuel our anxieties and fears, that will bloat us with indulgence and worldly cares.

The church calls it Advent. But we know it as the Christmas rush. What is the "it" we are afraid of as we begin this charming yet dangerous season? It can mean getting everything done. It can mean just surviving the season, the office party, the demanding relative, church officials, avoiding a breakdown, or the most modest ambition of not yelling at fellow motorists, salespeople, postal workers, and, most impossible of all, your own children. "I'm not going to make it" might mean we fear that we will never get into the Christmas spirit; that somehow, Christmas is going to happen, but it's not going to happen to us.

Today's Gospel does not deny the fears of our lives, including our Advent fears. It simply tells us how to deal with them. Jesus tells us to watch, to pray, and not to allow the season's cares to entrap us. Somehow, in the midst of trying to make it, each of us has to learn to be imaginative in how we watch, how we pray, how we not overindulge.

And so we begin this holy season, in which the secular world is as frantic as any time in the year, with strong messages of hope and a call to us for true awareness and a deepening of faith and love in our lives and in our communities. The Lord is coming indeed, in ways we could never imagine. We are going to make it.

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Pastor