

Isaiah 64:1-9

Mark 13:24-37

1 Corinthians 1:3-9

“Restore us, O God;
Let your face shine,
that we may be saved.” AMEN!

(Sing)

“Anticipation
Anticipation

is making me late.

Is keeping me waiting.”

No, this is not a ketchup commercial.

It’s a shame that the great Carly Simon song
makes me think of ketchup. :-)

“Anticipation.”

Yet, it is anticipation that is
the theme of today’s Advent texts.

In this week of hope...
we have anticipation. (Pause)

We must remember that the Latin word

“Advent” means “arrival” or “coming.”

And when December comes around
most of us are preparing for Christmas
and Christmas Eve.

We are preparing for the coming of the
infant Jesus to a manger, but the texts

for the Sundays of Advent will work
to steer us away from this kind of preparing
and remind us of the inevitable coming
of Jesus in apocalyptically form.

A Jesus who will come on cloud and chariot
to usher in the new millennia.

These Sundays will guide us to
keep alert and watchful.

To be anticipatory of a darkened sun, and a moon
that will not give light... with falling stars and
quaking heavens.

It's scary language that attempts
to roll us away from complacency.

Mark communicated to his audience that
we must be in a time of preparation, but

not to replay the birth of Jesus.

A time to wrestle about what it means
to get ready for his return. (Pause)

Like the bridesmaids who keep lamps
trimmed and burning, like servants prepared
to give back a return on God's investment and
not bury their gifts.

Jesus' parables show the ways we don't want to be
caught sleeping, nor unprepared.

"Anticipation."

But, this waiting is hard.

If we are ordered to always be alert and
always be "ready," and not sleep - well

I don't think I want any part of it.

That doesn't seem healthy to me;
to always be anticipatory and watchful.

I mean it sounds good, but how do we actually do it?

Fortunately, we have the whole account from Mark.

We know that Jesus gave this teaching and told this little parable to his disciples just a bit before he will ask them to stay awake in the garden while he goes off to pray.

And we discover that they couldn't do it.

This knowing does not give us the permission to discount (or ignore) Jesus' teaching but that we need to find a better way to be obedient to it.

And I don't mean we stock up on "No-Doz" or "Red Bull"! :-)

I do mean to say that we can't do it alone.

We can do this kind of waiting and preparing and anticipation in community.

Jesus' short parable talked about assigning doorkeepers to be on watch.

We should be sharing in the responsibility of watchfulness.

There's an urgent tone to "stay awake" but the intent is to safeguard the community and to encourage shared responsibility

and equal participation.

We clearly need one another to be able
to be obedient to what Jesus commands.

We cannot do it alone. (Pause)

We need one another to remind us
to not become hardened by
the injustices of the world.

We need one another to avoid
complacency and indifference.

We need community because it can be easy
to turn our backs to
the suffering that others encounter.

To get complacent and blindly
say, "That's "merely" a sunrise."

Merely a flower.
Merely a mountain.

Such language is noted well in
Virginia Owens' book
"And The Trees Clap Their Hands."

She goes on to say that it is

this “merely” quality of things
that leads to crime.

This “merely” quality of ease
that leads to waste.

This “merely” quality of life
that leads to war.

The season of Advent draws us out
to see that nothing is “merely.”

Not even rocks are “merely” in God’s design.

And if that’s true, then a family
stuck on the boarder looking for safe living
and honest work is not a “mere” thing.

And generations of war between Israelis
and Palestinians is not a “mere” thing.

Learning lessons from past mistakes
is not a “mere” thing. (Pause)

In this section of Isaiah, scholars call it 3rd Isaiah,
the prophet spoke
God’s word that proclaimed to the community
that “God meets those
who gladly do right.”

This prophet was speaking to a people
that were returning to their homeland after
being overtaken by the Babylonians.

A people that came home to find
destruction and change.

Their homes and their land
being lived on and in by foreigners.

It is not a mere thing to come
to such a disappointment as that.

Nor is it a mere thing to be living in
a place and others come to claim
the land you thought was yours.

Fighting erupts... it's not a mere thing.

People treating people as if
they are less than human.

The ways we behave lets us know...

The coming of the Lord will not
be good news to everyone. (Pause)

The season of Advent, and the

undertones in our texts today,
remind us that it is fair to know that
God is angry with us.

We want forgiveness.

We want to gobble up God's grace,
but we must wait for it.

In the waiting and
the anticipation,
there is suffering. (Pause)

So the kingdom of heaven is like
a married couple in love and relationship
for 15 years.

The husband commits adultery.
She didn't want to leave.

He is sorry for his transgression.

She is hurt, she is angry but
she does not want to leave her husband.

So they go to counseling and
the husband was truly contrite.

He knew it was a stupid moment of weakness.

Deeply regretted his action.

He admitted that it was a one time thing
and wished he'd not been so weak
in a moment of dumb passion.

Wife and counselor could see
he was truthful and that he was
thankful his wife did not want to leave him.

“But, why can't she forgive me?”
He questioned aloud.

It hung in the air.

The counselor said, “It's because your wife
trusted you to be faithful.

Now after fifteen years, you
have broken that trust.

Though she is committed not to leave,
you'll have to wait for her forgiveness.” (Pause)

I wonder if Advent reminds us of
this lesson about waiting.

The celebration of the birth will come soon enough.

Let's keep watch as a community together
with an anticipation that is hopeful and helpful
for others around us.

That even in the midst of destruction we can
go about life as God's children knowing
that God is both present and coming again.

"This work is almost done."

AMEN!