

Advent One - God's love and Grace is near - *Based on Mark 13:24-37*

Prayer:

“as soon as its branch becomes tender and puts forth its leaves, you know that summer is near.”

I long, we all long for summer to be with us in this way. The fig tree shoot is an incredible image of hope in the world. Come winter the tree branches are barren, devoid, it seems of any life whatsoever. (Pic 1). We just take it for granted that something marvellous will happen in the spring time but it is really a miracle. Soon the tender shoots give forth to leaves and in a very short time the tree bursts forth into life. (Pic 2)

My sister was up for a visit earlier this month and she brought with her some Crocosmia Bulbs. (pic 3) She told me how to plant them so I went out on the hillside and dug some nice holes and plunked the bulbs in there. She tells me I will have lovely plants in the spring like these. (Pic 4). How is that possible really? One waits for that to happen, sometimes not very patiently, but it does, a transformational miracle occurs.

I know I am going to have some difficulty waiting to celebrate, waiting until I can see the little shoots coming out of the thawing ground. I sure hope it happens. And when it does I will be out back saying “well there you are, how wonderful is that!” And then there will be more anticipation, more waiting, “come on come on I will be thinking, let me see some flowers!” I hope that happens too. And when they arrive, “yahoo,” more celebration. I can't wait. But I have to, we all have to.

We all have been waiting for an end to the Pandemic. We have been hoping for case numbers to drop, for hospitalizations to decline, for an end to restrictions on our coming and going, for an end to mask wearing, for a vaccine and most importantly for an end to the suffering that is occurring to the thousands and thousands that have become ill. We also have been hoping and praying for families and friends of those that have died. We are all getting a little tired and a lot frustrated.

When are we going to see some new growth, something to signal a revival, something to tangibly lead us out of the cloud that has been hanging over us for 9 months now? We are looking for some tender shoots budding forth on old wood that will signal, it will all be well again. In this

time, we can easily relate to the first few lines of this morning's gospel message.

²⁴ “But in those days, after that suffering,

***the sun will be darkened,
and the moon will not give its light,
²⁵ and the stars will be falling from heaven,
and the powers in the heavens will be shaken.***

It rather feels like that doesn't it. It is rather a gloomy if not depressing time. And it is not helpful that our prayer list has grown and grown. There are numerous good friends and a number of family members who are ill or who are recovering. There is a lot of pain and suffering “out there.” Of course, as Advent moves forward to Christmas memories flood to us. Many remind us of splendid celebrations but others can depress our joyful mood. Where is our hope planted in this time? Where is the promise of the new shoots that will graft some peace and happiness into our lives?

²⁸ “From the fig tree learn its lesson: as soon as its branch becomes tender and puts forth its leaves, you know that summer is near. ²⁹ So also, when you see these things taking place, you know that he^[a] is near, at the very gates.

In her commentary on this parable that Monika read today, Courtney Buggs says, “*The imagery of the ripening fig tree suggests a definite urgency; new sprouts hint that a new season is on the horizon (13:28). Similarly, the signs of the times let the disciples know, “he’s near, at the entrance” (13:29). Exactly who he is, is unclear.*”¹

However, I think Mark's meaning is pretty clear. God's love and Grace is near. It is always near.

There is much to be taken from this parable about Jesus' departure from his friends and what will happen after he is gone. The disciples are advised to stay awake because change is coming. They need to be ready. Through all of this there will be a time when the trials of their present situation will be resolved. They are to keep awake and keep a look out for new shoots, new opportunities where God will break through.

¹ [Commentary on Mark 13:24-37 - Working Preacher from Luther Seminary](#)

I think that is the same for us. Despite the barrenness of our present reality, the frustrations, challenges and grey clouds, God's Holy Presence is that promise that the bare branch of the dormant fig tree will sprout again. Advent Hope is about waiting and watching for that.

We are reminded of such promise while we journey through this season looking once again towards the birth of the Christ Child. And while we do, we can encourage this miracle of transformation in and around us through prayer, greetings, letters, cards, phone calls and waves. Those actions are like planting fertilizer around the trunk of the Fig Tree ensuring its vitality.

Thanks for Listening this Morning

Amen