

Grace and peace to you my friends and fellow sojourners from Jesus Christ, the Messiah, the one who **is** to come.

When you think of Jesus, what do you **hope** for, for you and, or for your family personally? **When** you think of yourself as a Christian, what do you hope for the world around you? **When** you think of Kihei Lutheran Church, KLC, as part of the body of Jesus and Jesus' church, what do you hope for its community - both within **and** around it? What are **your** desires and expectations for the holidays? For Christmas? For the New Year? Do you ever actually take time to think about and maybe even analyze these things relative to yourself and your life? Do you ever feel lost? Wondering who you are? What is life, actually everything, really all about?

Do not feel alone. The funny or not so funny thing is that that is a good part of the Israelite story in the Old Testament - the Israelites wrestling with these same questions over and over again. **I think** this is the struggle inherent in our human condition since, **well**, Adam and Eve. We **just** cannot believe and truly trust that the all-powerful Creator is actually really interested in relationship with us and desiring involvement in **our** mundane lives.

Christopher Davis in his commentary on our Isaiah reading today tells a story about taking his young son to Toys-R-Us where, believe it or not, they became separated. He talks about using the store security system including cameras and speakers to find and reassure his son. Christopher spoke to his son over the speakers, reassuring him that he could see him and knew where he was, even though the son could not see him. He also assured his son that he was on the way to him. The Israelites here in Isaiah are experiencing exactly the same issue as Christopher's son. They were crying out for help from someone they could not see, and they were not even sure that **they** were seen.

Have you ever watched a potter in action? How they lovingly use both their hands and their imagination to construct objects out of clay? Verse eight from our Isaiah reading says: "**Yet, O Lord, you are our Creator; we are the clay, and you are our potter; we are all the work of your hand.**" My attention was drawn to this verse for several reasons. First, I **have** watched potters in action but I definitely do not have that skill set. Second, these words and the images that go with them are part of one of my favorite hymns, "Have Thine own way Lord" when it says, "thou art the potter, I am the clay." Finally, the third reason is how **inclusive** this verse is when it says, "**we are all the work of your hand.**" I believe we should never make God smaller or limit God by questioning God's creative work even when we do not ourselves understand it. In those many moments, when you feel like or think that you cannot **see** God or God cannot see you, just remember that God **does** see you, that, in fact, God **promises** to see you. That the invisible hand of God **is** active and **is** looking after your life.

Anyone care to guess what shows up again in our gospel reading from Mark today? Yep, the end times or you know, eschatology. Our reading is the **second** half of the single **longest** speech by Jesus in the Gospel of Mark. It comes in the thirteenth of sixteen chapters. It is seemingly once again predominantly eschatological themed. It is also most likely the Markan shorter version of Jesus' long, last discourse in the Gospel of Matthew.

Mark Allen Powell was one of my seminary professors and the author of one of my regularly used resource books, that I have, in fact, held up in **this** very room. He says Advent is a season of waiting, a time to be marked by urgent anticipation, by a **longing** for the fulfillment of what has been promised. He goes onto say this reading today encourages readers to **look** for Jesus' return. He further suggests the possibility of "rapture-happy" Christians who were overly fascinated with the end-times existed even when this gospel was written. I believe that the gospels and actually the vast majority of the New Testament do have a fascination with the end-times. But I do want to point out, however, that the concept of "rapture" is a more recent theological development occurring in the late 1800's here in the United States. In any case, the author of Mark's Gospel seems **less** concerned with curtailing fanaticism and **more** concerned with challenging **complacency**. In other words, we need to live as though the end is at hand **and** we need to dig-in for the long haul because the eschatological timetable is known **only** to God. Many Christians, including myself **most** of the time, tend to think that since the time of Jesus' coming cannot be known, we need not think about it. This can clearly lead to complacency. I think the key here is finding the right tone of middle ground. God **is going** to bring about a new creation but we have absolutely no way of knowing when. We **must** be prepared but yet **also** continue to live and serve daily.

How many of you have emergency or tsunami kits in your home ready to put in a vehicle or maybe even already in your vehicle? I am pretty sure none of you are just sitting around waiting for that emergency or tsunami to occur. No, we all continue to live our lives to the fullest but we remain **also** prepared for what may occur suddenly. That, my friends, is our eschatological calling as well. Being prepared to see Jesus but also loving and serving others daily.

I suspect that almost every one of us have the initial reaction to this gospel reading from Mark, like that of a majority of Christians, is about the return of Jesus, what is often called the Second Coming. David Lose, however, makes a very plausible case that these words are about the events that occurred on Good Friday roughly 2000 years ago. I see a glimmer of hope that these words could actually be simply a glorified account of Jesus' trial, suffering, death, and resurrection. It really is plausible **and** also lends more credence to the words: "**this generation will not pass away until all these things have taken place.**" Think about it. Is it possible for Jesus' "Second Coming" to have been Jesus' appearances to the disciples after the resurrection? If true, how would that change our thoughts on Jesus, the kingdom, reality, and the world today?

Regardless of whether these words are about an event that already happened or one yet to come, which no one knows when except God, the real question then is, “what do **we** do in the meantime?” In the reading **that** answer is provided in just two words mentioned twice, in verse 35 and again at the very end of verse 37 – keep awake. Two simple words with a whole lot of hidden meaning just like the Boy Scout motto – “Be prepared.”

Jesus offered two simple commands to us to accomplish this task summarized this way: “**Love God and love others.**” An unknown motivation quote says it also this way: “Those who died yesterday had plans for today. And those who died this morning had plans for tonight. Don't take life for granted. In the blink of an eye anything can change. Forgive often and love with all your heart. You may never know whether you may have that chance again.”

Hear then the good news:

God might be disappointed with our behavior.

God might allow us to engage in self-destructive behavior.

God might allow us to shrivel up and blow away, like a leaf in winter.

But God's purpose has **never** been our destruction.

God's hope is the hope of a parent, who always hopes against hope that the children will see the error of their ways and return home.

God comes to us as we **are**.

Not as the people we are **trying** to be.

Not as the people we **promised** to be or so badly **want** to be.

God comes to us as the people we are.

The families we are.

The congregations we are.

The communities we are.

The nation and world we are.

Is there room for improvement in all these areas? Yes, of course.

But still, God comes to us the way we are.

Hear that again – God **comes** to us – period. That, my friends, is the meaning of Advent that we are waiting for – God comes to us.

Grace and peace to you, my friends. May you keep awake and **accept** yourself and others the way God does.

Amen