

First Sunday of Advent
Wicker Park Lutheran Church
Rev. Jason Glombicki
December 3, 2017

While we don't sing of Christmas in the church yet, it is still the most wonderful time of the year. We wish each other a "merry Christmas." We imagine angels sweetly singing o'er the plains. We envision that Jesus's birth came upon a midnight clear. Christmas-time is when we wait for God's presence to quietly enter into a peaceful world. And, according to today's reading, that is entirely inaccurate.

Mark does not describe a little town of Bethlehem nor a holy night. In fact, Mark doesn't talk about Jesus's birth at all. One of the very first things that Mark mentions is that the heavens are torn open at Jesus's baptism to reveal God's presence. Then, at the opposite end of the Mark, we hear that Jesus took his final breath and the temple curtain, which separated the people from the holiest place where God "lived," was torn to show God's presence. You see, Mark *is* going to tell it on the mountain, but he ain't telling of a silent night.

Mark paints the picture of a God who confronts a broken world. Jesus came into the world and tore things apart. Jesus unsettled the rich and the comfortable. Jesus showed that being divine is not about being served, instead it's about being a servant. Jesus showed that God's anointed, or the Messiah, rejected violence and pride. You see, being God's beloved means engaging in acts of love.

So, it's no wonder that the coming of God in Mark's reading meant that the heavens went dark and the world was shaken. When God is present, things cannot and will not remain the same. Yet, I'm not sure that we actually want God's presence. We're far happier with the status quo.

We'd rather eat well, keep our savings account flush, and do what makes *us* happy. Yet, that message is not Christ's message; that's the message of an entirely different god.

Holding God's message next to the world's narrative has been distressing. As I read more about the tax reform, I'm deeply concerned. You may think I'm overstepping my bounds as a pastor saying this statement during a sermon, but I will remind you that Jesus spoke more about how we use our money, wealth, and possessions than anything else.¹ I'll say that again, Jesus spoke more about how we use our money, wealth, and possessions than anything else. In fact, in Mark (10:21) Jesus will instruct all his followers to sell *everything*, give it *to* the poor, and follow Jesus's teachings. Why? Because money reveals our true identity. How we use our money communicates what really matters.

When you called me to this congregation, you directed me to “speak publicly to the world in solidarity with the poor and oppressed calling for justice and proclaiming God's love for the world.”² If this tax bill burdens the poor while liberating the rich as it is currently designed,³ I have no choice but to speak God's condemnation against this reform as immoral, unethical, and in direct opposition with God's teachings. With that statement, I feel as though Isaiah's words were written for this day, when he exclaimed, “O that you would tear open the heavens and come down,” O God. I pause with this feeling, and I wonder, where is our God? Where is the God of our ancestors who showed up in the unexpected? Where is the God who liberated the Israelites? Where is the God who made us in a divine image? While tax reform might not be where you are being agitated,

¹ <http://www.preachingtoday.com/illustrations/1996/december/410.html>

² See C9.03.1.8. of WPLC's Constitution at

<https://www.dropbox.com/s/sm55s7v5tml8w4v/WPLC's%20Constitution%20-%202017%20.pdf?dl=0>

³ <https://www.pbs.org/newshour/politics/how-the-senate-tax-bill-affects-rich-and-poor-in-three-charts>;

<https://www.forbes.com/forbes/welcome/?toURL=https://www.forbes.com/sites/johnwasik/2017/11/29/how-the-gop-tax-plan-scooges-middle-class-retired-and-poor/&refURL=&referrer=>

take a moment to think about where you are yearning for God's justice to come down. There is space at the bottom of page three in your bulletin to jot down your thoughts.

While I sit with my righteous anger, I hear of another sexual assault accusation. In the United States, these accusations have almost become as routine as mass shootings. Yet, in this trembling darkness, I wonder if there may be a glimmer of hope. Mark notes that after suffering sometimes we may see God's presence, and so, could God's reign possibly be seen in the vindication and testimony of the assaulted? Might the fullness of God's reality first seem like pain before relief? Might our wounds need to be drained before they can heal? While these assaults cannot be justified and are evil, could our prayer asking for "your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven," finally be approaching? It surely isn't here in its full form, yet, but, yes, it is manifesting itself here in unexpected places. So, ponder this question: in what painful situations have you seen God's presence and justice?

You see, we're in the Advent season. This is the time where we wait with hope for God's complete reign. We do not idly wait. Rather, we wait with anticipation, aware that our God has acted and will act again. We gather here to be purified and to be formed. Like a potter prepares her clay pushing, pulling, kneading, and throwing it, so too we are prepared by our God. We gather here to let the waters of baptism keep us flexible like good clay. We gather at this table to be strengthened like clay that is fired. Here, in this place, we come to be molded and formed by our God.

As we are formed and strengthened, we are sent to keep awake. We're empowered to keep alert for God's presence in the unexpected. We are challenged to use our voice for God's justice, our hands for God's peace, and our money for God's love. You see, God does not come to us on a

silent night, but rather God tears open the heavens and comes down to us this day. Thanks be to God. Amen.