

Wicker Park Lutheran Church

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With today's gospel reading, we come to the end of our year-long exploration with the gospel of Mark. However, it's not the ending of the book of Mark. Instead, we conclude our study with Jesus' reminder. In verse 6 we heard Jesus say, "Many will come in my name and say, 'I am he!' and they will lead many astray." We heard Jesus talk about wars, rumors of wars, earthquakes, famines, and all the things that bring people to fear and seek a supreme leader. In the rest of Chapter 13, we'll be reminded to watch, wait, and be alert for the real coming of Jesus.

You see, Jesus is aware that in times of uncertainty, fear, and change we humans seek to grasp on to anyone or anything that brings stability. We gravitate towards the leader who can say "I can turn around this company." We want to believe the politician who says, "only I can make things right in this nation." We pay an author to learn the 10 steps to leading a happy life, or the 5 ways to lose the weight, or the one thing you need to know as a parent. We seek someone or something that can give us the answers, and we often assume that if its new it must be best.

Yet, today, Jesus reminded us not to get caught up in the flashy new thing, person, or ideas. Jesus knows that others will try to gain power, control, or money with a new message. With a message that will not bring life for all people and all or creation. So, Jesus reminded us to stick to what Jesus has revealed. Don't go looking for a new *message*; rather, be alert for how God's message is revealed in new ways.

So, what's the message that God has revealed? Well, in Mark's gospel, Jesus revealed that power, control, and strengthen are not where Christ was revealed. So, if you see someone arguing for violence, that is not Christ; that is an imposter. If you see someone suggesting that the way of God is to collect the most awards, metals, and accomplishments as possible without any concern for others, that is not Christ; that is an imposter. If you see someone demeaning another, wielding power over another, or humiliating another, that is not Christ; that is an imposter.

And the thing about imposters is they will capitalize upon the uncertainty, they thrive in unstable environments, and they succeed in places of doubt. It's the times when we doubt that compassion, service, and love are the supreme markers of God's presence that an imposter more easily takes hold.

You see, in today's reading from Mark's gospel, Jesus reminded us to look at his ministry. Look and see that the presence of God is found in the compassion Jesus showed as he healed a man with a withered hand even though he wasn't supposed to do work on the Sabbath. Jesus revealed the hallmark of service as he fed the five thousand. Jesus showed the primacy of love through peace as he calmed the raging winds and fear-filled sea. Today, Jesus pointed us to remember the God's central message and stick with it.

That's a helpful reminder as we wrap up our study of Mark's gospel. So too, in this Advent season, we live in the sure and certain hope that God will bring about Christ's full presence. We don't know when it will be completely shown, but we do know that we can participate in the how. It's the small gestures in our corner of the

world that add up to the fullness of God's reality. Things like, supporting our ministry partners by donating food or giving money to provide food for those who hunger. In that, we embody the essence of Christ. Or, when we choose to welcome the stranger in peace, whether it's the foreign-born stranger, the sexual minority stranger, the disabled stranger, or the religious stranger. In that work towards peace, you become the embodiment of Christ's peace.

So, friends, as we conclude our study of Mark today, don't be fooled by the world when lipstick is applied to a pig and promised to be your savior. The Advent season is about the hopeful anticipation of the full revelation of our God who comes in compassion, service, and love. Any other message comes from an entirely different God. So, friends, let us give thanks for Christ's revelation. Let us celebrate a God who comes to you and me to freely share compassion, service, and love. Let us seek God's manifestation together during this Advent season. Amen.