

BIBLE STUDY
November 27 and 30, 2023

THE FIRST SUNDAY OF ADVENT

Isaiah 63: 16b-17, 19b; 64: 2-7

Mark 13: 33-37

1 Corinthians 1: 3-9

1. Advent and Cycle B

- We are a lectionary church. We follow the Lectionary which is a collection of Scripture readings designated for each Sunday of the year. There are 3 cycles in the lectionary. Each cycle focuses on a Gospel. Cycle A=Matthew, Cycle B=Mark and John, Cycle C =Luke
- Advent is four weeks of preparation to celebrate the birth of Christ at Christmas. Advent is a time of joyful anticipation of the coming of Christ. The first Sunday of Advent focuses on the second coming of Christ at the end of time. The second Sunday focuses on John the Baptist. The third Sunday focuses on rejoicing at the nearness of Christ. The fourth Sunday focuses on Mary and the preparations for Christ's birth in Bethlehem.
- In Advent we meditate on the three comings of Christ: his birth in Bethlehem, his coming into our lives every day, and his return in glory at the end of time.

2. Isaiah 63: 16b-17, 19b; 64: 2-7

- These verses form part of a prayer to the Lord begging him to save his people just as he did in the past at the Exodus.
- V. 16b: -17: The people call upon God as father to stir up his compassion for them. They seem to say that God has made them wander from his ways and has hardened their hearts. Again, they try to stir up God's pity for them.
- V. 19b: These words are sung in a very ancient and well-known Advent hymn: Rorate Coeli. The people wish that they could just rip the heavens open and make God come down to help them.
- V. 2: The people pray for a new revelation of God like his epiphany on Mt. Sinai. They pray that God would show forth awesome deeds of power so that all nations would have no doubt that he was God.
- V. 3: No one and nothing can compare with God. He is beyond all that we can imagine.
- V. 4: A prayer that when God comes, he will find us doing what we are supposed to. They acknowledge that they have sinned and that they deserve God's anger.
- V. 5: The sins of the people have made them like dirty rags and dried up leaves.
- V. 6: No one cries out to God asking for pardon. God has hidden himself. He has left his people to the consequences of their deeds.

3. Mark 13: 33-37

- The Gospel of Mark was the first of the Gospels to be written. It was probably written somewhere after 70 AD. The theme of Mark's Gospel is to reflect upon Jesus as the suffering Messiah. Mark writes to a community that is suffering persecution. He wants them to see that their sufferings are joined to those of Christ. If they share in his sufferings, they will share in his glory.
 - Mark 13 is called the Eschatological Discourse. Eschatology refers to the end of time. Jesus is teaching about the end of time. It is also apocalyptic, meaning that it employs a whole array of symbols taken from Isaiah, Daniel, Ezekiel, and Joel to attempt to describe the unimaginable. They should not be taken literally but poetically. They make present a whole body of Biblical imagery designed to paint a picture of the end of time.
 - The major lessons of this discourse are (1): we do not know the time of the end of the world, only God knows. Do not be fooled by those who say they know or can predict the time of the end of the world. (2) do not misinterpret the signs of the times as predictions of the end. There are bound to be earthquakes, wars, and famines, but they are not necessarily the end. (3) Be watchful, be aware, be vigilant. Treat everyday as if it were the last day. (4) the signs of the end are also the signs of the beginning—of the new heaven and earth that will come.
 - Jesus teaches about the Great Tribulation—that evokes the memory of the image of Zeus set up in the temple of Jerusalem by Antiochus Epiphanes, in the days of Daniel the prophet. I am not clear as to what this refers to: is it the destruction of the temple by the Romans in 70 AD? Is it Jesus' death on the Cross—that he described as destroying the temple and he would rebuild it three days? Whatever it is, will usher in a new age.
 - V. 33: We must be watchful and always vigilant.
 - V. 34: Jesus offers a parable to describe how we need to be watchful. It is like a man who goes away and places his servants in charge and tells them to be watchful. Jesus is the one you will go away and place in charge of his Church on earth. We must be ready for his return.
 - V. 35: We do not know when the Lord will return, we have got to be ready. Treat every moment as the last moment.
 - V. 36: Do not let him surprise you and find you asleep—unprepared.
 - V. 37: Watch! That is Jesus' final word.
4. 1 Corinthians 1: 3-9
- Paul's opening prayer of thanksgiving to the church at Corinth thanks God for the grace they have received that has confirmed their faith and strengthened them to persevere until the day of the Lord Jesus Christ.
 - God is faithful, meaning that God is true to his promises. If he said it, he will do it. The Corinthians can depend on God's fidelity if they persevere until the end.