

Advent 1A - 2022 (liturgical year 2023)

Here is a sure-fire, Advent season test to determine how old you are. Is time now rushing past you faster than you can imagine? Or is time creeping and crawling along, slowly dragging on its belly, torturing you with its puny progress? **If you're a child, Advent is an eternity**, a seemingly endless stretch of December days and waiting for Christmas. **If you're an adult, especially a normal, hurried, harried adult, the four short weeks of Advent leave us breathless--not with anticipation, but with exhaustion.** Time is relative. If you don't believe me, believe Albert Einstein, who didn't like the phrase "everything is relative," but enjoyed playing with it, like in this explanation of relativity to a reporter: "An hour sitting with a pretty girl on a park bench passes like a minute," Einstein quipped, "but a minute sitting on a hot stove seems like an hour."

Christmas proves time is relative. The more relatives coming for Christmas, the faster it speeds by. Or here is another proof of relativity: **"Black Friday."** As retailers keep trying to pump up profits, "Black Friday"--the kick-off shopping day for the official Christmas buying-frenzy--has been turned into the **longest day of the year.** A few years ago just a couple of big chain stores began opening early. They offered special sales between the hours of **7am and their usual opening time of 10am.** Then doors began opening at 6am. Then 5am. Then this year it was 4am. You heard right: 4am. But that wasn't enough for one huge mall outside Seattle. At this mall the **entire place opened at 12:01am**, with all the stores prepared to stay open until Saturday at 10pm. "Black Friday (so named because merchants hoped a strong showing on that day would put them "in the black" for the whole holiday season) is now more apt a name than ever. **The biggest sales are conducted in the blackness of night.**

In this week's epistle text Paul had some particularly pertinent things to say about "darkness" and "light," about "night" and "day," about preparing for one reality, while living in the midst of another. Paul recognized that the all-too-human ostrich tactic of **"If I can't see you, you can't see me" was an easy occasion for sin.** Under cover of darkness **evil deeds seemed invisible and unknown.** Paul picked some easy human targets of bad behavior, after-dark activities as popular in the 1st century as in the **21st century--drunken revelry, sexual immorality.**

But Paul also put **"quarreling" and "jealously"** into that same category of wickedness. Of all the "fleshly" sins we are capable of committing, it is often those accomplished by a sharp tongue, a biting bitter remark, a **subtle stab of nastiness** that most effectively **douse the light and hope in relationships and communities.** Paul wants to shine a bright light on all our activities, all our words, all our behaviors, brining everything done by those who confess Christ into HD (high definition) focus. Although Paul uses the contrasts between light and dark to illustrate his discussion, ironically Paul's point is that for Christians there IS no night vs. day, no dark vs. light.

Since Christ's arrival on earth, since Christ's life among us for our sake and "our salvation" (v.11), we live in a different world than that of night and day, or dark and light. Christians live in a pre-dawn life, in the overlap of the ages, between the three stages of Advent. That's right, you heard it correctly. In the Christian tradition there is not just one advent we celebrate, but three.

1. The First Advent is the coming of Christ to earth.
2. The Second Advent is the birth of Christ in each one of us on earth.
3. The Third Advent is the final return of Christ to earth.

Dingle Peninsula - Skellig Michael

Down in the extreme southwest of Ireland, the Dingle Peninsula juts out into the Atlantic Ocean. In the seventh century, that peninsula was the westernmost point in all the known world of Europeans of that time. Just a few miles off the rugged coast, some monks in those days built a monastery at Skellig Michael, a tiny, steep, rocky spit of an island named for the archangel whose trumpet call is to signal the return of the Lord in glory.

For the better part of seven hundred years the monks and their followers eked out a bare and spare existence, waiting for the return of Christ. They survived countless trials—seven hundred years of trials: loneliness, isolation, frightful weather, and even a ninth-century assault by Vikings, who abducted their abbot and starved him to death. Nothing budged these monks from their rock of vigilance—nothing that is, until monastic reform arrived in Ireland, and less demanding orders of Benedictines and Augustinians began to grow to prominence there. In the thirteenth century, the remaining monks on Skellig Michael got into their little boats and rowed solemnly away from their island outpost forever.

Writing of their departure, Barbara Brown Taylor observes:

No one knows for sure why they left, but it seems entirely possible to me that they just got tired of waiting. Seven hundred years is a long time to watch the horizon for the coming of the Lord. It is a long time to say your prayers, keep your fasts, and live in disciplined community together, especially when the word reaches you that those on the mainland have made some changes. They are eating better and sleeping later than you are. They have decided they can be in the world a little more without being of it, especially since it looks like they are in for a longer wait than anyone had expected.

--[Chandler Stokes, First Presbyterian Church, Oakland, CA](#), quoting Barbara Brown Taylor, *Seeds of Heaven: Sermons on the Gospel of Matthew* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2004), p. 108.

Foresight

Someone once asked Wayne Gretsky, the great hockey player, how he managed to become the best goal-scorer in the history of the game. He simply replied, "While everyone else is chasing the puck, I go where the puck is going to be." (by Brett Blair, www.eSermons.com)

We've Done Everything Else

"We have learned to soar through the air like birds, to swim through the seas like fish, to soar through space like comets. Now it is high time we learned to walk the earth as the children of our God." (by William Sloan Coffin)