

November 29, 2020

Ahh... the first Sunday of Advent—a traditional time to be watchful, a time of expectation, a time to ponder what God might be doing in our midst. It is also the first Sunday of the new church year, so happy New Year everyone!

Our gospel readings for this year will focus on Mark. And generally speaking, I like Mark, but our reading for this morning, as you just heard, well, uffda!

Mark 13 is known as the little apocalypse... The second coming is embedded in rather disturbing language. The Sun will be darkened, the moon will not give its light, and the stars will be falling from heaven... Tremendous change and huge ramifications.

This morning I'd like to do a little reflecting on change. And I'll be honest right up front: I don't like change! I'm always suspicious of change. There is change that is for the better, and then there is change that is not!

Bunch of little stories today... One of my favorite web sites is a place that sells guitars. It's called Musicians Friend. I've been a customer of theirs for years and years, and I'm very familiar with it.

I like the way the web site is organized. From their home page I know exactly where to go to find this or that... I know where to look for all the sales... I know how to check my account and see if I have any extra points that I can use... I'm familiar with it, it's easy for me to use.

Well, about a month ago, it got redesigned! For some reason, they changed the look of the home page. The pictures were bigger... The icons were different... And it irritated me, I had to relearn how it worked.

And I wondered to myself, why in the world did they do that? Couldn't they just let well enough alone? It seemed like they made changes just to make changes, and I didn't like them! Maybe they were keeping up with design trends, I don't know, but it wasn't change that I appreciated! In fact, I wondered if I should go shopping elsewhere. Change isn't always for the better...

Another story... I remember vividly when Johanna was born... We owned a small home in south Minneapolis and we got busy fixing things up. I remember finishing a new bed room; hanging sheet rock, and painting. I guess today we call all that activity "nesting." It's all about anticipation, and getting ready.

One of the things I remember so vividly was the sheer power of hopes, dreams, new possibilities, and change. It's amazing how the mind suddenly grasps onto how everything will change and how the change will affect your life.

I remember thinking about my job, wondering if we needed a new car... Babies change lives; it just seemed prudent to think about these things a little bit.

And along with all the reflecting about how things would change, there was also an amazing sense of awe... I remember wondering what this new life would be like: who would this person be, what kind of work would this person accomplish. All very exciting!

And yes, when she was born, our lives changed in ways we could never have imagined! I don't know if it was like the stars were falling from the heavens or not, but it sure seemed like it to us!

It was this mixture of excitement, and at the same time, tremendous responsibility! Our worlds were turned upside down! Absolutely everything changed! From our sleeping patterns, to our jobs, to our priorities, to our friends, to how we went grocery shopping, to our recreational activities, the sailboat had to go...

Change was huge, and change was everywhere... But this kind of change, was for the better. This kind of change was a matter of the heart! When Johanna was born, my whole world shifted. And from the moment I held that little peanut, I knew nothing was going to be the same... And it hasn't been...

When the gospel writers talk about the second coming of Jesus, they paint a picture of absolute change, a change so big it is nothing short of earth shattering... But instead of it being change for the sake of redesigning our fears, this kind of change will be a redesigning of the heart, and nothing will ever be the same.

Rather than being enemies of one another, we will be brothers and sisters...

Rather than being fearful of one another, we will embrace... Rather than despairing of our lives, we will be filled with meaning and purpose... Rather than being hopeless, we will be hopeful!

This is what Advent and this second coming is all about. It's about anticipating that hope which fundamentally changes everything. Hope is like human energy; it animates us, it motivates us to act in ways that brings that hope closer to reality. Hope imagines a better world, and reaches into our hearts to bring that world into being.

This is the good news. This is the future that we pray for. The Jesus we watch for bears love, peace, mercy and justice for all people, here on earth, and hereafter in Heaven. And we insist the Kingdom comes. And for the God we believe in, nothing is impossible.

As we await the birth of Christ, during this Advent season, what do you hope for, what will be born in your life, this year? Amen.