

Advent 1 2020 Mark 13:24-37

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Michael Wood

Today is the first Sunday in Advent. Advent is from a Latin word meaning 'arriving' or 'coming'.

What most people THINK what is arriving Santa. You know – the Christmas pageant. All the floats are merely precursors to the main act – the arriving of the bearded man.

But what is arriving is something quite different. Some of us may have seen the Netflix series, 'The Messiah'. If not, I highly recommend it. The premise is how the world would react to The Messiah arriving today – a bearded middle eastern man. In this Netflix rendition, as the Messiah walks around and preaches and has conversations with politicians, his repeated statement is 'The World is Ended'.

The gospel reading we heard today for the first Sunday of Advent reminds us that Christmas is NOT actually about a birthday party of Jesus but something of cosmic proportions. What is arriving is for us is the end of an old world.....and the beginning of a new one.

Peter Jensen, a previous Anglican Archbishop of Sydney (who I would say, is not someone I would normally find myself quoting) said in one of his Boyer lectures a few years ago, "how often has it occurred to most parliamentarians that when they say the Lord's prayer at the beginning of each parliamentary year that they are praying for the end of this world and the beginning of a new one? They pray this, as we do, when we say, "Thy Kingdom come, on earth".

Throughout human history there has always been an interest in the things to do with the end – the ending of old things and the beginning of new. We still see this on street corners occasionally with the guy who holds the placard – "repent for the end is near".

What is it like to watch for the end of an old world and the ADVENT (arriving) of a new one?

This Gospel reading we heard today is set within a conversation Jesus is having with his disciples about the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem. The 13th chapter of Mark begins with these words:

*"As they came out of the temple, one of his disciples said to him, 'Look teacher, what large stones and what large buildings!' Then Jesus asked him, 'Do you see these great buildings? Not one stone will be left here upon another; **all** will be thrown down'"*

It is likely that St. Mark's Gospel is written in the few years leading up to this destruction (or shortly after). The Emperor Nero was trying to scapegoat Christians for the great fire of Rome in the year 64, and this resulted in the Roman Jewish from 66 to 73. Jesus comments

about the temple being thrown down is a prediction of the destruction of the Jerusalem temple by the Romans in 70AD.

When the temple in Jerusalem was destroyed it was as if the world was ending. We cannot underestimate the impact. If this story was set today, then it could have been set in many places. It could have sounded like this:

- “As Jesus came out of the Twin Towers in New York, one his disciples said to him, “Look teacher, what large buildings!” Then Jesus asked him, “Do you see these great buildings? Not one concrete slab; not one pane of glass will be left upon another; all will be thrown down”.

Running from the falling rubble and the rising smoke, it was as if the prediction of Mark 13:24 was coming true:

“in those days, after that suffering, the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will be falling from heaven, and the powers in the heavens will be shaken” (Mark 13:24-25)

Jesus advice to his disciples is to not be led astray. He says:

“Beware that no one leads you astray, many will come in my name and say, ‘I am he! And they will lead many astray. When you hear of wars, do not be alarmed; this must take place, but the end is still to come” (Mark 13:5-7)

The point Jesus is making is that we ought not to read any theological significance into such violence. This kind of violence is not originating in God and to say that it is to lead people astray.

One feature of traditional Jewish Apocalyptic language such as what we are hearing in Mark today, is that God violently overthrows the old world of evil in order to introduce a new one in which the evil are destroyed and the righteous are rewarded. Mark borrows this language but subverts it. Yes, God is overthrowing the old world and bringing in a new one, but it is precisely the violence of the old world order which is being overthrown NON-violently. This occurs on the cross, where instead of God killing humans, God allows himself to be killed by us.

We can see how Mark does this in verse 35:

- 13:35 **“Keep awake for you do not know when the master of the house will come.... evening, or at midnight, or at cockcrow, or at dawn...”**

Well, what’s the first thing the disciples DO in the garden of Gethsemane? They fall asleep.and what else what happens that night? How does the master of the house show up?

.....14:17	He shows up at Evening....as host of the last supper
.....14:32	At Midnight...in being arrested in the Garden of Gethsemane
.....14:72	At Cockcrow....when Peter denies him
.....15:1	At Dawn.....when he is handed over to Pilate

For Mark, the decisive hour of God arrives in the scapegoating of Jesus. The Son of Man comes in power and glory through the crucifixion and resurrection and releases an outbreak of peace into the world. This is not something that only happened once, a couple of thousand years ago. The dying and rising of Christ happens in the eternal present moment – the only moment we can ever know.

In the crucifixion of Jesus, God undermines the way we humans play the blame game. Jesus becomes the scapegoat to end all scapegoating.

And yet Jesus is also a realist. Even as he faces his own execution he is pointing out how his peace will not come easily within the fabric of our space/time universe. Even as the power of the resurrection is rippling out into the world, humans are resisting this movement by continuing to wage war. But there is a promise of Jesus is that peace will prevail and, in the end, the lion will lie down with the lamb. And that crucified lamb reigns in the middle of the heavenly Jerusalem.

The apocalyptic vision (the unveiling) of Mark is that this violent world is already passing away and God's kingdom is arriving. The biblical scholar James Alison says that the human violence we experience is like fireworks in the lee of an erupting volcano. The erupting volcano is the resurrection. It started erupting on Easter Day 2020 years ago and it is showering us with an outbreak of peace.

Sometimes life can feel like three steps forward and two steps back. But if we do our maths, that means that we are still moving forward, one step at a time, drawn by God's grace into God's resurrection which is right now, today, in this very moment.

The peace and hope of the Lord be with you.