

Notes on Sermon preached on the First Sunday of Advent (and the Sunday of Thanksgiving weekend), November 30, 2008 by the Rev. Samuel H. Hartman, St. Mary Anne's Church, North East, MD

Turkey leftovers are in the fridge.

Maybe there is still a piece of pumpkin pie, and a little bit of cranberry sauce.

Thanksgiving decorations are still on our altar, reminding us of the abundance of God and the harvest.

Or – if you are tired of all that –

Christmas lights are lit.

It is easy to find Christmas carols, playing incessantly on the radio.

We are making advent wreaths today for Christmas decoration.

And – of course – we can go shopping!

Ah – the “holidays,” as we say, are upon us. I don’t know whether to wish you all this morning a “Happy Thanksgiving” (a little late) or a “Merry Christmas” (a little early).

But suddenly – in the midst of it all – *STOP!* This is the message of our scripture readings this morning.

STOP – LOOK AROUND – LOOK FOR GOD

Isaiah says it clearly: God – tear open the heavens. Don’t just stand there God – do something!

The psalmist grieves: How long will you be angry with us God; we drink bowls of tears.

Jesus himself speaks: the sun and moon will be darkened, the stars will fall, the heavens shaken!

What is going on here? These are not “holiday” scriptures! Did I look at the wrong page in the lectionary? Did I choose the wrong readings? Where are the stories of thanksgiving abundance? Where is the baby Jesus?

It’s Advent – and the first word is stop – stop and discover what is *really* going on in our world.

Behind all the turkey dinners and cheery Christmas music stands

Stark reality –

Lines of people stand outside our Outreach office, looking for help and food.

There are terrorist attacks in India.

Crowds break down the doors of Walmart, killing workers, just to get the newest electronic gadget.

We remember a time when our nation wanted to *be* good – but now all we want is to *feel* good.

We remember a time when the stock market was high – and we felt *rich!*

And many – many of us – feel depression, sorrow, loneliness at a time when the world says “Be Happy!”

We “knock, knock, knock on heaven’s door” – and no one answers.

We need God, we yearn for God –

Stop – where is God now?!

The moon and sun are dark.

We drink bowls of tears.
Don't just stand there God – do something!

This is Advent!

“Yet – O Lord – you are our father.
We are the clay and you are the potter.
We are all the work of your hands.
Do not be angry with us – we are your people.”

In spite of it all – all the stark reality of our world, of our lives – there is hope.
There is hope because there is God.

And this is Advent too.

“The tender leaves of the fig tree sprout” – look – we should know what that means.
There are signs of hope:

A smile

A helping hand

The great stories of God from the past –

The possibilities of God in the future.

There are signs of God's breaking into our world –

Publicly and privately.

There is the hope of God in political change, economic change.

In private consolations and reconciliations.

If we look, there are signs of hope in our troubled world, and in our troubled world.

This is Advent too.

This Hope is not a nostalgic yearning for the past, a good turkey dinner we remember with a loving family gathered around, now eaten. It is not a familiar Christmas carol, now sung and over. Hope is not a yearning for a return, to a life we once knew.

Hope – advent hope – is always about the future. God will come. God doesn't look back – God looks ahead and creates new things.

God will come

Light will come.

The child will come.

Come Lord Jesus.

Help us to cast away the works of darkness.

Help us to put on the armor of light, now in this mortal life of joy and sorrow, abundance and want, peace and trouble.

Come to us now

Be with us now,

So that we may welcome God, always, in God's future, when God comes and creates the new, again and again, and always.

Amen

(Thanks to The Christian Century and Feasting on the Word for some of the above ideas.)