



Sermon for the First Sunday of Advent , November 2020

St. Luke's Episcopal Church, Coeur d'Alene The Rev. Dr. David Gortner

[Isaiah 64:1-9](#)

[Mark 13:24-37](#)

*Restore us, O God of hosts; *
show the light of your countenance, and we shall be saved.*

There are three things I want you to hear today, as a call to this holy season of Advent. Three things:

1. Yearn for God, yearn for good. Your yearning matters.
2. Stay alert, awake, steady, and ready. Be true to what God has given you to do.
3. Do your part to tear open a little corner of the heavens, for the world around you.

So, the cry goes up today in the words of Isaiah, from a world desperately hungry for God to come and set things right. "Restore us, O God of hosts – restore the world, save us all, and set things as you mean them to be!"

This year has brought us closer than in a long time to feelings of gloom, doom, and a looming end. We have been shaken across our nation and world by a mutated microscopic organism that we are ill-prepared to deal with, and we see just how fragile life is and how little control we have – and we pray that we will find strength to survive this and other onslaughts of nature and to learn from our experiences. We have been stunned and troubled by deep political divides that feed and are fed by deeply divided ideologies and ways of seeing reality, and we see just how weak and stubborn we are – and we pray that we will not tumble into violence against one another. We watch as people in power stumble, bumble, brandish swords, threaten one another, ignore their own people, and we see just how fragile and corruptible are all of the structures we build. We experience the weaknesses and fragilities of our own families and communities. And – when we are honest – we see the fragility and stubbornness of our own lives.

It can all seem rather apocalyptic. The end of the world can always seem like it is just around the corner.

There are times in every age that seem like the Apocalypse. And even in seeming times of rest and peace, every time is apocalyptic for some people. For some, justice and care continue to be held far away, even when society all around seems to be thriving. For them, every age and place can be apocalyptic.

In this kind of world, at these kinds of times, our yearning for God stirs up even more strongly. And that is the cry of the prophet at the dawn of the season of Advent. “Oh, that you would tear open the heavens and come down!”

Our yearning matters! Yearning is “a feeling of intense longing for something.” It is deep and passionate desire.

Our yearning for God matters. It is what opens our hearts and puts us truly in touch with our deepest desires and emotions. On his website, “Soul shepherding,” Bill Gaultiere writes, “Longing for God is the breath of our souls! It is yearning for God with our heart that opens our souls to breathe in the Spirit of Christ and live for him alone...There’s nothing more important to our lives than longing for Jesus Christ. And the beauty of it is that when we seek God we discover that God was already seeking us! That’s the Gospel!”

We expect, hope for, cry out for Christ’s return.

Every Sunday, we say some form of this together as we pray the Eucharistic prayer: Christ has died. Christ is risen. Christ will come again. And every time we pray the Lord’s prayer, we say, Thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

This yearning is part of our faith. It is part of our life.

When we yearn for God to come down, to be with us and move among us, we allow ourselves to feel all that we carry – the pains and sorrows, the joys and wonders, and the eagerness for all things to be filled and completed.

So, yearn for God this Advent. Let your hearts long for God, for Christ’s presence, for the stirring of the Holy Spirit.

And, just to be clear, yearning is not the same as predicting. Yearning for Jesus Christ to return come again is different from trying to predict when it will happen. We do not know the day or hour of Christ’s return – we don’t even have a vague glimmer of the decade or century. So, Jesus sets us with our focus on keeping the master’s domain, business, household running – keeping to what we have been given to do, faithfully, and with liveliness and continuing readiness for the master to return.

So, in the Gospel today, we hear Jesus say, “Keep ready, keep awake.” Don’t lose heart, don’t give way to drudgery or heartlessness or disinterest in the life you have been given. Live – and live fully. Give yourself to what God has given you to be and to do. Every little moment matters.

This doesn’t make our yearning disappear. But it opens space for us to live fully while we wait. So, Jesus says, “Keep ready, keep awake.”

Oh, Lord – Oh, that you would tear open the heavens and come down.

Stay awake. I will come again. For now, give yourself fully to the life you have.

And maybe, take hold of a corner of the fabric of heaven and tear it open. Maybe you can open a little bit of heaven and bring it down into this little corner of life, here and now.

But how can I, unclean as I am, unclean as we all are now?

I am the potter, you are clay, and I can mold and shape you if you let me, to fit the purpose for just such a time as this.

And so, the last thing is this. Listen for God's prompting. You are part of tearing open little corners and tiny windows of heaven. As we pray, "Oh that you would tear open the heavens and come down," God is quietly waiting for us to listen and to hear the question, "How might you tear open a corner of heaven for the world around you, now?"

So, friends, some questions for us all.

What is that little corner you can tear open for people around you?

Who do you know that is feeling really overwhelmed right now?

- Is it a relative?
- Is it a teacher or school administrator?
- Is it a friend who is unemployed, or a colleague who works in a hospital?
- Is it an elected official?
- Is it a cop?
- Is it a homeless person you have seen many times?
- Is it the outsider socially, politically, racially, economically?

What can you do and be, to help people glimpse of Christ who promises to return in glory?
What is a vision of glory for them?

And, a question to help spark our creativity for others:

Who has torn open a glimpse of the heavens for you?

What was it they did? What of heaven, what of Christ's glory, did you see?

This Advent, friends, let our yearning awaken fully. Let us pray our yearning with all our hearts. Let us stir to wakeful watching and to steady faithful living. And let us be open to the Holy Spirit's prompting us to dare to reach out and tear open little corners and tiny windows of heaven for the world around us – and to see when others are doing the same.

Come, Lord Jesus. Come quickly. And make us ready.

Amen.