

**Mk 13:24 - 37 Advent 1 The Coming of the Son of Man  
Rev. Susan Pickering**

Gathering of the People of God

**Organ Prelude**

**Welcome & Notices**

**Centring Prayer**

Let us prepare our hearts and minds for worship,  
let us rest in the silence, breathing in the presence of God...

**Processional Hymn:      Hail to the Lord's anointed..." TIS 275**

**Call to Worship**

We gather in this space,  
To listen to the ancient stories.

**Open our ears to hear the Word.**

We gather in this space,  
Entering the time of waiting.

**Preparing our hearts for the One who is to come.**

Come, let us gather together,  
Let us journey into Advent,  
Let us offer our thanks and praise to God.

**Gathered together, ready to journey,**

**Let us worship God.**

**Acknowledgment of Country**

We recognise that God created heaven and earth, the sea and the sky, and all that is in them.

**This land is Holy Ground**

As we gather we acknowledge the traditional custodians,  
the Turrbal and Jagera people, elders, past, present and emerging

**We honour them for their custodianship of the land,  
on which we gather today.**

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**Lighting the Advent Candle**

This year has been like no other,  
COVID seems to have robbed us from so much,  
A world filled with suffering and uncertainty.  
Take heart,  
Advent is here,  
The wait has begun.  
We light this first candle.  
Let it be for us a sign of hope,  
Hope amidst the chaos and mess of the world,  
Hope that your light will break in through the darkness.  
***Let your light be the hope for all people  
Struggling in a troubled world.***

**Hymn: Christ be our Light**

**Introit**

**Prayer of Thanksgiving & Confession**

God, YHWH is your ancient name.  
At the beginning of Advent, a time of waiting  
we give thanks for your promises,  
for your faithfulness and steadfast love.

You are a God of love, a God of justice,  
and on this first week of Advent we bring our prayers of confession.

World AIDS day is upon us  
and we name that we live in a world  
divided through fear and ignorance.  
The world has failed to learn,  
failed to love and failed to call for justice  
for people discriminated against because of HIV/AIDS.

International day for the Abolition of slavery is upon us  
and we name that as we head into advent  
we head into the frenzy of consumerism.  
The world fails to consider the ethics behind purchases,

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The world fails to acknowledge the millions of exploited and vulnerable people trapped in debt bonded slavery and within the contemporary slave trade.

International day of persons with a disability is upon us  
We acknowledge that we live in a world where people continue to face discrimination,  
A world where barriers are placed in the way of our brothers and sisters with disabilities,  
These barriers often preventing people living life to the full.

As we enter this season of Advent,  
Forgive us God,  
In this time of waiting may we continue to be active,  
Working for your justice and love to fill this world.  
Send your Spirit upon us to strengthen us,  
To speak words of wisdom into our hearts.  
Lord as we wait,  
hear our prayer.  
Amen

**Words of Assurance**

YHWH, God's ancient name - the promise of forgiveness is ours, so embrace the forgiveness and love, let us live as truly liberated people of God

**Thanks be to God.**

**Doxology: I Waited on the Lord (Iona x3)**

Service of the Word

**Children's Story Strictly No Elephants**

**Readings**

**1st Reading: Isaiah 64:1 - 9**

**Gospel Reading: Mk 13:24 - 37**

This is the Living Word

**Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.**

**Anthem**

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**Message**

Uncertainty has been the only certainty this year, that said it is with great certainty that I can say we've arrived at the first Sunday in Advent. Today marks the beginning of a new liturgical year, and we begin our journey through the Gospel of Mark. There's so much in today's reading, as always it's connected the whole, and set within a particular context. The whole of Chapter 13 'forms the last major block of instructional material,' in just the next chapter Jesus will head to Gethsemane, with the disciples, where he will pray and then he'll be arrested and betrayed.<sup>1</sup> Our reading today is part of 'Mark's little apocalypse'<sup>2</sup> apocalypse meaning revelation,<sup>3</sup> and part of Jesus' eschatological discourse,<sup>4</sup> eschatological from Eschaton meaning end times.

It's understood that when the Gospel of Mark was written that there was great upheaval, 'one of the worst in Jewish History,'<sup>5</sup> this was a community struggling 'in the historical moment of war,<sup>6</sup> during the Roman invasion of 68 - 70 C.E.<sup>7</sup> It was a time of great suffering, poverty was increasing, violence was prolific, people lived with pain, loss and trauma, the guts of Israel's traditions had been ripped out. Apocalyptic literature raises its head throughout the ages when people feel that have 'little chance of fighting back against the powerful and of gaining political, military and economic power.'<sup>8</sup> Hence Apocalyptic literature sometimes been referred to as literature of the oppressed or of the dispossessed.<sup>9</sup>

The first part of our reading presents us with calamitous cosmic events; sun being darkened, moon giving no more light, stars falling, powers of heaven being shaken.<sup>10</sup> Imagery of the world been returned to it's primordial state of darkness and chaos.<sup>11</sup> While perhaps the imagery is far beyond our comprehension, and

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<sup>1</sup> Juel

<sup>2</sup> Borg

<sup>3</sup> Harrington

<sup>4</sup> Harrington

<sup>5</sup> Montgomery in Feasting on the Gospels

<sup>6</sup> Myers

<sup>7</sup> Taussig in Feasting on the Gospel

<sup>8</sup> Ched Myers

<sup>9</sup> Harrington

<sup>10</sup> Mark 13:24 - 25 NRSV

<sup>11</sup> Chen in Preaching the Word on [sojo.net](http://sojo.net)

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sometimes avoided, generally because they've been used and abused to manipulate people and create fear, which is not their purpose, we must engage. The language and imagery, is evocative and poetic, it's like that of oracles of judgement spoken by the prophets in the Hebrew Scriptures.<sup>12</sup> In the ancient world stars were understood as 'powers in their own right, considered as conscious beings.'<sup>13</sup> In context what is being suggested is that the highest structures of power will fall.<sup>14</sup>

Once the powers have fallen, we have the Advent of the 'Son of Man coming in the clouds,'<sup>15</sup> and the 'vindication of the elect.'<sup>16</sup> This imagery echoing the book of Daniel, with a human like one coming in glory, one given dominion and kingship, the dominion an everlasting dominion never to be destroyed.<sup>17</sup> In Daniel the understanding is that the human one would be served by all peoples,<sup>18</sup> whereas Mark turns this reverence upside down, having already declared that 'the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve.'<sup>19</sup> The reference to the Son of Man coming in the clouds is 'a pivotal text in a very important theme of Mark's Christology.'<sup>20</sup>

We then encounter the Lesson of the fig tree.<sup>21</sup> Within the first verse we encounter the phrase μαθετε την παραβολην<sup>22</sup> learn the parable, (mathete ten parabolon) this is the only appearance of the verb μαθηρειν (mantherien) from which the word μαθετε (mathete) or as we know it, disciple, derives.<sup>23</sup> Anyhoo, earlier in Mark we'll find Jesus cursing the fig tree and then sharing the lesson from the withered fig tree, in between the two, Jesus cleanses the temple.<sup>24</sup> The cursing of the fig tree

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<sup>12</sup> Isaiah 13:10, 13; 24: 21, 23, Joel 2:10, Ezekiel 32: 7-8, Amos 5:18-20 NRSV

<sup>13</sup> Wink - Naming the powers

<sup>14</sup> Myers

<sup>15</sup> Mark 13:26 NRSV

<sup>16</sup> Harrington

<sup>17</sup> Daniel 7:13 - 14 NRSV

<sup>18</sup> Daniel 7:14 NRSV

<sup>19</sup> Mark 10:45 NRSV

<sup>20</sup> Harrington

<sup>21</sup> Mark 13:28-31 NRSV

<sup>22</sup> Mark 13:28 Greek New Testament

<sup>23</sup> Myers

<sup>24</sup> Mark 11:12-25 NRSV

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was the ‘first hint that [Jesus] intended to repudiate the temple state,’<sup>25</sup> a decision that seems to be made clear in his temple action. The lesson to learn then in today’s summary of these seems to be that the world of the temple, which represents a particular social order must come to an end, for this will then make way for a new social order to dawn,<sup>26</sup> the summer is near. The call to learn concludes with assurance, urging that people are to have ‘total confidence’ in God’s plan.<sup>27</sup>

The final section concludes with the need for ‘constant vigilance as the plan unfolds and reaches its climax.’<sup>28</sup> Jesus highlights that no one knows the time, only the Father.<sup>29</sup> In this account slaves are given authority, each is given his task, the foremost it seems identified with the command to the doorkeeper who must be watchful. As it continues there is no escape from the references to the trial and passion account, ironically, once at Gethsemane, Jesus asks the disciples to stay awake, as he leaves in a state of distress to pray, on his return he finds them sleeping.<sup>30</sup>

So much to take in and perhaps it may seem a little strange to have a pre-crucifixion reading at the beginning of Advent, before Christmas celebrations, but this is also a time of waiting and anticipation of the Parousia, the second coming of the Human One, and so the apocalyptic moment of the cross is significant, this generation will not pass away until... this what Gandhi refers to as Saty-ha-gara, the force of truth revealed. The moment of the cross is the breaking of the dominant order, the temple state dismantled and the powers overthrown.

For many people this year, as we’ve watch the darkness of the pandemic descend upon the world, it’s been a year of suffering and pain, uncertainty has become the norm. So much has happened. The Black Lives Matter movement rose up at the injustices experienced by the black communities, its mantra ‘Stay Woke’ a call for people to pay attention to what was happening. The Zimbabwean Musician and Human Rights Activist Oliver Mtukudzi (tuk-ud-zi), who died earlier this year, wrote a song “Wake Up” in fact all of his music was a challenge to acknowledge the social and economic issues that govern people's daily lives,’ Wake up was a call to

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<sup>25</sup> Myers

<sup>26</sup> Myers

<sup>27</sup> Harrington

<sup>28</sup> Harrington

<sup>29</sup> Mark 13:32 NRSV

<sup>30</sup> Mark 14:34, 40

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action to see and address issues such as political unrest, rising HIV rates, and wide-spread poverty.<sup>31</sup>

This apocalyptic reading this morning is an invitation, it offers us hope that the whole of creation can be renewed and transformed. The graphic imagery reminds us that God is 'infinitely more powerful than all other powers'<sup>32</sup> the falling of the stars is the falling of powers. It's a reminder that 'the cross is not defeat, but the Advent of the Human One toppling the powers,' the cross stands at the centre of our faith.<sup>33</sup>

As we begin the journey through Advent towards Christmas we need to remember that more than 2000 years ago the dawn of a new world began with the first of the birth pangs, Mary carried in her womb a life that brought justice, peace and love in to the world in ways that turned the world upside down, this tiny human one would force the Truth to be revealed and that Truth is that there is another way.

God's plan continues to unfold and, as disciples, we are called, stay awake, we are called into action to continue the work of God's plan and to see that the world is pregnant with possibility. The call to stay awake is a call to action, a call to welcome the in-breaking of God's kingdom in a world that's broken, in a world where people feel disenfranchised, to see the people on the margins in our community and rather than be filled with discouragement, to be moved by compassion. It's a call to ensure that all people are accepted, received and valued as God accepts, receives and values. It's a call to create new and inclusive communities. It's a call to ensure that light shines on injustice. It's a call to live the Jesus way, a way that offers hope, a way that welcomes, it's the way of love.

**Prayer**

God of Advent, we give thanks that you continue to call us and for the hope that is offered through Jesus the Christ. Send your Spirit upon us, may she visit us afresh this day whispering to each of us 'stay awake, the kingdom is near,' reminding us of the possibilities and opportunities that lay before us to be a renewed and inclusive community.

**Hymn:           View the Present through the Promise CH 479**

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<sup>31</sup> Powery

<sup>32</sup> Chen in Preaching the Word on [sojo.net](http://sojo.net)

<sup>33</sup> Myers

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**Prayers for the People**

And as a sign of sacred unity, we join together in the prayer;

**Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done,**

**on earth as in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our sins, as we forgive those who sin against us. Save us from the time of trial and deliver us from evil.**

**For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours now and for ever. Amen.**

**Peace**

Sending Forth the People of God

**Hymn:                   “Lord of Creation...”       TIS 626**

**Words of Mission & Blessing**

Let us go into the world,  
Let us stay awake,  
our eyes open to the people around us,  
Let us stay awake,  
Our doors open wide with welcome,  
Let us stay awake,  
Our hearts filled with love and moved by compassion.

May the blessing of God, our bringer of hope,  
bless us with patience while the world still weeps.  
May the blessing of Christ, our strength,  
bless us with the courage to never give up believing in peace.  
And may the blessing of the Holy Spirit, woman wisdom herself, bless us with  
prayer as we enter the journey of Advent.

**Recession**

**Postlude**

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