



Advent 1, Year B – November 27, 2011

Isaiah 64.1-9, Mark 13.24-37

A Homily preached by the Rev'd Tara Livingston

My love, my love, it has been so long since you hid your face from me and left me all alone. My love, my love, I have angered you, I know, but I long to once again have you walk beside me, to be the light upon my path. I always used to know, to be assured, that I was not alone but now, but now I have lost your favour and I suffer in the sight of your anger. Gone are the days when your presence was a beacon to me, your protection my shield and your love my comfort. My love, my love, I beg you to return.

In the first reading from Isaiah this lament comes from the very heart of the people. They cry night and day because God's presence – God's presence in the form of a burning bush and a guiding light – has left them and they are alone. While they acknowledge that God's anger might be justified because of their unfaithfulness they continue to cry out into the darkness, pleading for God to return to them. They are living in a time of anticipation and of faint hope, the faint hope that God will one day return to be with them as he was in the days gone by, the days when God spoke with the prophets and lead his people to the promised land of Israel. In those days, for those people, there was no light and they longed for God to return.

This was the time before Christ came.

Part of our Advent journey can be found in this lament. Part of what we celebrate in these next few weeks is imagining ourselves without God to walk beside us, just as the people of Israel felt that God was no longer there. This is difficult for many reasons not the least of which Christmas has already arrived on the streets and in the malls. Another reason is that we know how this story ends – we cannot truly live in the sensation of an absent God because we know that a baby is about to be born to bring God's presence back on earth – so we know that the lament of the people of Israel was answered in Christ.

But we are asked to suspend our imagination.

Have you ever had a perfect moment – a moment in time when you experienced a type of joy, or a kind of peace, that you didn't think possible? The feeling of unexpected wonder when you saw a most perfect sunset; or after a long time of anticipation the feeling of awe when they handed you your baby girl for the first time, the unanticipated sense of peace while hiking in the mountains on a impeccable summers day; these moments when all other worldly concerns just slip away and we are perfectly rooted in ourselves. The first flushes of love, the unexpected joy of a gift unexpected can cause us to feel that all is right with the world.

We have, I hope, all experienced these moments of perfection. They are alas, fleeting and occasionally the time in between can be spent waiting, hoping, even, for that feeling to arrive again. We wait, you see, because we have been given a foretaste of what is possible, of what is attainable and our souls want desperately to experience that again. For most of us we just simply....wait. We wait in the absence of perfection, satisfied with the mundane and occasional moments of contentment. We wait in the place in between the "already and not yet".

So if what we are waiting for is the birth of a baby to bring back God's presence on earth, what of the apocalyptic message we hear in today's Gospel reading? Why could we possibly be listening to the words of Jesus as he tells his followers of the Son of Man coming in glory, reigning down on clouds from heaven?

Isn't he the guy? Wasn't the birth of a baby in the manger the point – the culmination of God's response to the people of Israel?

Just before the Gospel verses that we heard this morning the disciples are standing in awe of the city of Jerusalem and Jesus warns them that all they see; the walls of the temple where God resides, will no longer be there. He tells them that God will no longer be in an expected place where you visit at an expected time. He begins to tell them that God will be found on the cross – in the ultimate sacrifice. You see they think that they have "arrived"; that this is the moment but Jesus reminds them... not yet.

Kingdom theory states that we are living in a place of in between – of "already and not yet." Yes, Jesus has already been born, the big day that we will celebrate in a few short weeks, so then what is the "not yet" that we await? It is this. It is the coming again in glory. The birth of Jesus was but a foretaste of the kingdom, a foretaste of what we are confident will come again. Just as those moments in our lives when we experience a true sense of euphoria, we know that it is possible and we wait for it to come again. We wait for the return, even a return of a more long lasting perfection, and while we wait Jesus tells us to be ready. In a few minutes we will celebrate the Eucharist, a reminder of God's presence with us and, just like an unexpected peaceful sunset or those first flushes of a new love, it will be a foretaste of the banquet which is yet to come.

Christ is reminding us of the kingdom that is yet to come. This is the "not yet" part. Yes, we here gathered are part of the kingdom, creating it, even, but Christ promises that that perfection will come again. But alas, not on our time; not by our mulling over our scriptures trying to unlock the secret cues, not by creating man-made circumstances of control over a biblical piece of land, not by separating ourselves from the world in which we live and work and love. For as much as we would like to dictate, or at least to be able to put the event on our calendar for a particular day, this is God's time line, not ours. We must, as Jesus says, work hard, live fully and love one another because we know not when God's kingdom will be fulfilled, when God's true glory and love for all of humanity will arrive. But we must be ready when it does.

My love, my love, why have you forsaken me and kept your love from me?
My love, my love, when will you return?

The answer just might be, I never left you, I am with you always but soon, my beloved, soon, I will once again walk beside you in all my glory.

Now keep awake, all you people of God, for we know not when the kingdom will come again. Keep awake as we wait in this time in between, the time of already and not yet.