

It's About Time!
Sermon Advent 1
Rev. Dr. Leah Fowler
Presbyterian Church in Leonia
December 3, 2017

Isaiah 64:1-9
Mark 13:24-37

Which of you took the time during the day last August to observe the solar eclipse? Even though here in New Jersey we were not in the path of totality, I enjoyed sitting with some church members in Overpeck Park to watch-- through safety eyeglasses of course-- the darkening of the sun. Of course we have astronomers to explain the mechanics of how the eclipse happens. In an earlier time, however, I can imagine people who lived and worked by the light of the sun having great trepidation over this break from the regular rhythms of light and darkness.

Mark gives a number of signs-- including the darkening of the sun-- to point to the coming of Christ, sent with the angels, gathering his elect from the ends of the earth to the ends of heaven. This passage is known by biblical scholars as the "little apocalypse," which to me sounds too cute and dainty. An apocalypse is an experience of the end times, or a final destruction. I'm not sure how you can have a little apocalypse-- does this mean the world ends, but only by a little bit?

Last week I was on my way to a meeting when I passed a car accident that had just happened on Broad Ave. As I slowly rolled past the crushed cars, I rolled down my window and asked, "Do you need help?" "Yes!" the driver in one of the cars where the airbag had deployed cried back. I stopped my car not knowing what kind of help I could give. Frankly, I was nervous that I would find an injured passenger, blood, someone on the brink between life and death who needed the kind of help I could not give. As it turned

out, thankfully, no one was injured. The call to the police had already been made. I asked what kind of help the woman needed. And she just told me, over and over again, how she had been riding along in one direction when someone coming from another direction had missed a stop sign and collided with her. She kept repeating it over and over. Once I heard the sirens coming, I gave my well-wishes to the drivers and drove on to my meeting.

I can relate, though, to that feeling of being headed in one direction when something collides with you and sets you off course. We have all had that happen, whether it is a car wreck, or a lay-off, or an illness. We are going along, doing our thing in life when BAM! It happens, and our life is thrown off course. It can feel like a little apocalypse, like your world has ended just a little bit.

That feeling is quite the opposite of peace, which is the theme of the first candle we lit for Advent today. We may feel that sense of chaos on a personal level. We may also see it on a larger scale, as we look at a tax bill that will punish the poor and reward the rich, and as we read the news and consider what a toxic mix of unchecked ego, unstable personalities, and nuclear capabilities might bring. We look to God and wonder, like Isaiah, “Why don’t you tear the sky apart and come down? The mountains would see you and shake with fear. They would tremble like water boiling over a hot fire. Come and reveal your power to your enemies, and make the nations tremble at your presence!”

God, it is about time you showed up. When we are in a mess is *exactly* when we need a Messiah. The Messiah, or Anointed One, was the one the Jews waited for with the expectation that he would come and make things right. But often that Messiah was predicted to be like a military conquering king, coming with swift might and establishing authority that would create peace through the fearful submission of the other nations.

I know a studious, introverted woman who adopted a child, imagining her daughter would grow to love quiet afternoons curled up with a book, just like she did. The child who became her daughter is dyslexic, so reading is a source of anxiety for her, and this girl has the kind of energy that fills the room and bounces off every wall. Although they have belonged to each other for twelve years now, this mother and daughter still struggle with how to relate. It did not take long before mother and daughter each zeroed in on each other's weaknesses; but what became exposed in each one's vulnerabilities also revealed each other's strengths. Ultimately they discovered by each beholding the other's differences, mother and daughter each somehow becomes more whole.

The God who shows up for us is not necessarily the God the prophets foretold, or even the God we expected. The God on the other side of the Advent doorway is not going to come stomping through the world, making the US budget fair and just, ending disease and serving Starbucks Gingerbread Lattes to all.

Mark's gospel talks about keeping awake, being ready, waiting at the doorway because the Promised One at any hour. Just as we look at the world and at our lives and the chaos within it, and think, "*It's about time* God showed up and offered us a little peace!" The church gives us the practice of Advent. Advent is about time. It is about using our time, these days until Christmas, as a doorway to God. This doorway is a place of transformation. In Isaiah, the prophet advised, "Yet, O Lord, we are the clay, and you are our potter. We are all the work of your hand." The time we spend preparing in Advent will actually change us, even as we wait on God to show up. Whether it is following the Origami Advent Calendar with meditation Yukiko taught us how to make, using the Communion meal today to feed your longing for Christ, or practicing a moment of silence each day to find a layer of peace hidden deep beneath the chaos, I am with you in presenting myself at the doorway, waiting on a knock, an invitation to enter, and a chance to be transformed.

Jesus is coming-- not to end things, but to make things new. May this Advent form each of us as we stand at the door, waiting, and ready to receive Christ. Amen.