

First Sunday of Advent, November 29, 2020, Year B

St. Andrew's Anglican Church, Douglas GA

The Rev. Fr. John E. Commins+ Rector

Scripture: Mark 13:24-37

"The King is Coming"

Today, we begin a season of preparation, of waiting, anticipating, and hoping for the coming of the King – there is only one King - Jesus Christ, who, alone, saves us from everything that is trying very hard to destroy us. The word Advent comes from the Latin *adventus* - which means *coming*. Advent is a season of new beginnings – as we turn today from the Liturgical Year A to Year B – beginning a whole new year of readings in the Three-Year Cycle. Advent is also a time in which we are seeking and searching for hope - or at least a break from the fear that tries to surround and engulf our daily lives. This first purple candle that Lily lit this morning is the Advent Candle of Hope. Next week we will light another purple candle and the following week the rose candle (you might think it is pink – but the liturgical term is rose.) Then finally the last purple candle will be lit. On Christmas Eve – all of these candles will become white and the large Christ candle in the middle will be lit as well. We give thanks for the first coming of Jesus, and we are anticipating His next coming. In light of that anticipation – it would be good for us to hold onto these words from our first reading today from the Prophet Isaiah calling out to God: *"O that you would tear open the heavens and come down."* In answer to that prayer, Jesus stepped into time and into this world when He was born of Mary, to save each one of us – and He is coming again – to reign forever!

In today's Gospel of Mark – Jesus offers these words filled with hope and truth in Mark 13:31 *"Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words, will never pass away."* We know that these words are faithful and true, and they give us hope and direction for our days ahead. Jesus' words tell us that His word, the Word of God, is eternal, trustworthy, and true – and that we need to be reading and sharing His Word with the whole world.

In Mark, chapter 4 - Jesus' gives His primary message for us to *"Listen."* Jesus says: *"Let anyone with ears to hear listen."* How many times have I stood here and said "O Lord, open our eyes, our ears and our minds to Your Holy Word." We have got to not only see, but to listen. Jesus said, *"Let anyone with ears to hear listen."* It is very strange that Jesus is surrounded by people who are unwilling to listen; unwilling to listen to Him or to hear what He is really saying. They refuse to hear the actual voice of God speaking of a new way of living, that is not based upon power and violence. To truly "listen" is to hear through the ears of Jesus Christ, through His heart, and to hear the cries of those in need and hear that true power comes in doing service for others. How many of us have prayed to be able to hear with Jesus' ears? I know I have prayed with many of you, at times, praying that the Lord would give you His eyes to see yourself, the next time you look in the mirror, so that you can feel better about yourself. We have to forgive ourselves. In order to love others – you have to love yourself. If you do not feel good about yourself – how are you going to feel good about others. If you are a liar – how can people believe you? It is a simple truth.

Today's Gospel message is part of Jesus' "Olivet discourse." The Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke share with us Jesus' teaching from the Mount of Olives. In this lesson from Mark,

chapter 13, Jesus' tells His followers to "Watch – to stand guard." Jesus tells us to "*Be on guard, Be Alert!*" He stresses the need for us to open our eyes and see the world as God sees the world. Pray that God would allow you to have the eyes of Jesus Christ - to see the world as it really is; to see the events of the world as Jesus sees them – not as something that is horrible and terrible – or people that are horrible and terrible – remembering that every single person is His creation. Some of them have turned on Him – but He still loves them. In the midst of terror, and anxiety, we must recognize that God is there; He is not only in control, but He has a plan to help us through it. We also need to have eyes to recognize evil for what it is. When you walk into a room that is dark – don't you notice it? You notice that you cannot see things, things are hidden, and when you turn on the light everything becomes revealed. Jesus in the Light while Satan is the darkness. God has a plan to help us through it. Evil is from the enemy and it is nothing more than an empty promise which is totally meaningless. It is like receiving an empty envelope. Meaning and purpose to life can only be found only in the only One who created the world; the One who promises to save all those who look to Him in times of terror, distress and heartache – and to trust totally in Him – Jesus our Lord.

In Mark 13:24-25, Jesus' words begin with what many perceive to be foreboding and terror. He says, "*But in those days, following that distress, " 'the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from the sky, and the heavenly bodies will be shaken.'*" These sound like frightening events, but we have in our lives witnessed events of real terror as well. If you remember September 11th, we all have images and our own and personal memories of that time. Each one of us has personal stories regarding that day.

In answer to this terror, Jesus warns us to "*Be on guard, Be Alert!*" Jesus is telling us to keep our eyes open and keep watch and be alert! So that we can see things as God wants us to see them, and see God in the midst of all this terror as He is promising us hope. It is one of the best 4 letter words that I know. Love is too, but that is another candle for another Sunday. He promises us Hope. We must recognize that only God gives our life meaning.

Life is not defined by the fear or the threat from the enemy, who just wants to scare us and throw us off track, trying to control us. We need to recognize evil for what it is, and recognize that God is with us. We sang a hymn this morning – O Come, O Come Emmanuel. Emmanuel means "God is with us" and that He is at work right in the midst of all the evil that surrounds us. Each one of us should be asking God to give us eyes to see things as He does; asking Him to let us see people and things as He does. We need to see in a new way; to keep awake and aware of God's way of seeing.

Jesus reminds us that the time is coming, that none of us knows, in which the King is coming – and so we have got to be ready, we have got to prepare. The King is Coming! It is time for us to broaden our vision; time to stop looking over our shoulders for those who threaten us and instead see the broken people who need God in their lives, who need His healing and mercy, who need that emptiness that they are feeling, that 'black hole' to be filled with the Light of His love, who need the comfort of His Holy Word. We all need to have God in our life. We have

been created to know, love and worship God. When someone does not know God - they are left with a large “black hole” in their life – and because of that emptiness, many seek to wreak havoc in the lives of others. When you are not happy – you want to bring other people down with you, you see it all the time – just put on the news.

Knowing God, serving Him and worshipping Him is what we as the church, the community of believers, the Body of Christ, in fellowship – are called to do - to come together and grow – and to step out sharing Christ’s love with the community around us. We can make a difference by being an example to others in the way we live – based on God’s example in His Holy Word. We need to let Christ’s light shine in us. To *watch, to keep alert or awake* is to open our eyes and see God active in our world.

Psalm 80, which we prayed together today, reminds us of the cry of the people to Almighty God: “*Restore us, O God of hosts; show the light of your countenance, and we shall be saved.*” The Prophet Isaiah declares to the Lord God to come and save His people: “*Oh, that you would rend the heavens and come down, that the mountains would tremble before you! As when fire sets twigs ablaze and causes water to boil, come down to make your name known to your enemies and cause the nations to quake before you!*” (Isaiah 64:1-2) People have been crying out for God to save them – and many missed it! They missed the fact that He alone is the hope of the hopeless!

God did step into history – in the person of His Blessed Son, Our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, but the people did not recognize the King and instead, they ridiculed, rejected, and condemned Him to death. They hung Him from a cross. God’s promises cannot be destroyed – Jesus rose from the dead on the Sunday Morning – and is alive today! Remember, God did promise that His King would reign. When Jesus the King, comes again – His followers will have nothing to fear – but instead to rejoice that He has come to reign over them and draw them to Himself for all eternity. Jesus said in the Gospel of Mark 13:26 “*Then they will see THE SON OF MAN COMING IN CLOUDS with great power and glory.*” There will be no mistaking this event – none whatsoever! What will be fearful to many – or as Isaiah said, “*that the nations might tremble at your presence,*” will be a means for those who know Jesus – to see Him face to face and worship their King! We who know Him have nothing to be afraid of, we will recognize Him coming on clouds with power and great glory. His words are true – and you can take that to the bank! Jesus also told us that “*Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will not pass away.*” (Mark 13:31) It is in His Words that we can put our trust, and know that He is as good as His promises. I call that Hope.

We enter this season of Advent, a time of anticipation before the festive season of Christmas that is to come; we also need to recognize it as a time of anticipation for the One who is to come again. We see all around us things that give us false hope and false meaning to our lives. As beautiful as a Christmas tree is – it has nothing to do with Jesus. Those things are not where our hope lies. As followers of Jesus Christ, we long for the coming of the One who promises release to the captives, gives sight to the blind, and faith in Him brings hope for you and me in

First Sunday of Advent, November 29, 2020, Year B

the midst of all that would incite terror in us today. Hope is not found in the promises of politicians and world leaders. Hope for the world is found in One who came as a vulnerable child into this world, who knows our fears and our terrors and cries with us in the midst of the terror, but also shows us a way through the terror to hope. It is Jesus who has the power to destroy the powers that destroy people! He is coming – the King is coming!

We are not to blindly ignore what is happening in the world today. We need to think about the events, but instead we are to watch them with new eyes – which are illuminated in the light of the hope – the light of the Gospel. Watch, Keep awake, the Savior of the world is about to return and in that is great hope! The King is coming!