

This is the first Sunday of Advent. Advent is the brief church season that leads to Christmas. The church season that just ended goes from Pentecost to Advent and is called Ordinary Time. Think about that, we're leaving Ordinary Time, I'm not sure I can take the extraordinary time of Advent. If that was ordinary, it doesn't seem quite so crazy to expect the Sun to fade out, the moon to cloud over and the stars fall out of the sky. Jesus tells the disciples to watch out for his return – and he compares those cosmic catastrophes to the tender green bud of a fig tree. Whatever sign he points to, the message is the same. There will come a time when the earth will signal Christ's coming. Jesus isn't fooling around here – he says to the disciples, and thus to us, don't take this lightly, I'm talking to you. I'm talking about now.

A book I've been reading, "Something that may shock and discredit you" begins with these words: "When you were younger and you got home early and you were the first one home and no one else was out on the street, did you ever worry that the rapture had happened without you? I did". The notion of the end times, the apocalypse, the rapture – escatology - has always been a stumbling block

for me. It's the part of the Bible I don't want non-Christians to read. I associate it with Christians who expect at any time to be gathered in, taken up by Christ leaving the rest of us here under the fallen stars and tepid sun. I never really understood why anyone would yearn for such an event until I worked with a very sick church member; very sick and very poor and very religious. She and I studied the book of Revelation together – using two different study books. It was a big disappointment to her – she wanted to know WHEN – she had been bent down by the world for so long – how much longer would she have to wait.

Even understanding her yearning to be rid of her pain and loneliness, I still did not subscribe to the Parousia. I still don't expect this appearance of the Son of man in clouds, becoming the clouds so that no one will miss it. Is Christ coming back; Is the world going to be swept up in a new heaven and a new earth?

The Biblical scholar Lamar Williamson says, “Mark 13 speaks to those who expect too much and to those who expect too little. It is especially pertinent for those who have forgotten to expect anything at all”

Expecting too little, too much or nothing at all might exist in us all at the same time. A yearning for the Second Coming at the least testifies to an awareness that Christ is not among us in flesh, and to a yearning for Christ to be within us at all times. With us at a time like this. If we doubters were ever going to welcome the apocalypse, it would be now.

By now, the expecters of too much – might be anxious, impatient, and perhaps a little passive. I still have a hard time wrapping my head around what we are living through, the universality of it. There is no place where green pastures lie by still waters without the specter of COVID-19. There are many of us who have forgotten to expect anything at all. Only at glimpse or a word, do I fully take in what we've lost, what we're living without; I live with no knowledge of when this will end; I don't try to find out; will this end? Jesus tells us no one knows the exact day and hour of his return.

For me and maybe you too, the Second Coming of Christ in a global upheaval doesn't occupy much of my thoughts. Unlike the boy who thought about it whenever no one was around. But it is something that Jesus brings up time and again; the Bible ends with the book of Revelation detailing the actions and

atmosphere of the new heaven, the new earth. We sort of slide by these things. The communion liturgy contains the words, “we show forth the Lord’s death until he comes again” There’s a slight jar to mentioning Jesus’ death that can only be righted by the expectation of his coming again. What are we to do with this? I don’t see these so much any more but there was a time when the supermarket checkout was full of newspapers with headlines about the end of the world. The accompanying story would list the signs, and show how they had been fulfilled in events we had not thought to interpret as signs. Perhaps today, with the Internet, we don’t see these publications anymore; but they continue and for many are a way of life – finding the signs, preparing for the homeowner to return.

So, again, what are we to do with this? Dismiss it as a phenomenon of Biblical times? Take it as metaphor? The essence of this scripture is that Christ will come into our lives again, in the spectacular appearance in the clouds, in the ordinary return of a homeowner after a long absence. Christ will come into our lives.

Perhaps that is how we can live this out. Perhaps Christ is banging at our door, pushing to get through

our defenses, wanting to be as big in our lives as an angelic figure – after all, that is the point, Christ and how Christ wants to be with us – not the stars falling, or the sun fading, but if that is what it takes to get our attention, bring it on. Perhaps we can allow this Christ into our daily life, perhaps instead of cosmic powers trembling, it is the trembling hand of the hungry, the sick, the sorrowful that Christ wants us to take. Perhaps if we embrace Christ's second coming in each day, we will no longer wonder about it, we will live it – in small changes to our priorities, in how we spend our time, how we show Christ's love. This second coming brings honor to the every day, ennobles the Ordinary.

And maybe that is the Extraordinary of Advent that follows the season of Ordinary time. The Extraordinary of realizing our particular captivity this past week; realizing our yearning for the full house and laden table and overriding it with the greater desire to be part of fighting this virus. And maybe as we move out of a contentious and divisive time which unfortunately has become ordinary, maybe the Extraordinary thing is looking into a barn, awaiting a birth, seeking reconciliation in an infant; maybe the Ordinary thing of individualism and

ambition is replaced by the Extraordinary act of a young girl's obedience. And maybe the Second Coming we're told to expect descending from the heavens is actually ordinary, the Extraordinary is the realization that Christ has come again and is nestled in our hearts, the Extraordinary in our hearts bursting open with a willingness to let Christ be in charge of our lives. Extraordinary this time of virus and uncertainty, is the time of joyful waiting and simple obedience. Extraordinary.