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Advent 1 B (Mark 13:24-37)

Jesus said to his disciples, "In those days, after that suffering, the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will be falling from heaven, and the powers in the heavens will be shaken."

It would seem possible that the end of times is now – that Jesus' foretelling has come to pass.

Well, truthfully, it has always been the end of times.

If I had been preaching in, oh, say, the year 1699, I would have cited the 350 political rebels executed in Moscow, Jews were driven from Lübeck, Germany, the people of Rotterdam rioted over the high price of butter, Sweden was divided among Denmark, Russia, and Poland; oh, and coming up on January 1, I'd say that the dreaded Gregorian Calendar will be officially adopted by Denmark and the Holy Roman Empire, catching up to most of Western Europe and causing havoc among financial institutions... Great Britain will probably debate this endlessly, or at least until 1752. Oh, and the magnitude 9 Cascadia Earthquake will soon take place, so don't plan your move to the Pacific Northwest just yet.

It was a bad year. And this has been a bad year. On the other hand, the colony of Massachusetts observed a day of fasting for wrongly persecuting witches. So it wasn't an *entirely* bad year. Except for the accused witches.

There have been armed conflicts, plagues, famines, and injustice for, seemingly, forever, haven't there. Jesus wasn't predicting anything new, exactly, except that he was putting the oppression of Rome, the ever-present evil of slavery, hard times, he was putting all this into a theological perspective.

The message?

Be alert: God is watching us.

I find the patience of God fascinating – wondrous, actually. Here we are with our wars and our human-created misery, and God watches. For me it is the image of the divine being sitting behind a gauze curtain, drumming fingers, perhaps consulting with the Archangel: "When will they get it?" he asks. "When will my children understand that war is not the answer, that the hungry of the world need to be fed, that air and water are my gifts that they have polluted, that they must treat one another with dignity? When will they get it?"

And so from time to time there are messengers – people like Isaiah and Micah and Jesus and on and on who say, "This is wrong. This must end. Stop fighting and behave yourselves."

So we have this time of Advent, one of Christianity's gifts. We have this time, you see, to *prepare*. To reflect on our absurdities and our atrocities. To make things right. To behave as if we really believed in Jesus, *really believed* that what he said is true: that we should love God, and love our neighbor. And to be people of action, not just quiet faith. People who cry out for

justice for the poor and those who are different, people who feed the hungry, people who put their energy into educating children not closing down Planned Parenthood, people who put an end to war and violence, people who are unwilling to allow racism and sexism to persist.

We have the luxury of time. But it is not a luxury we can squander, for it truly *is* the end of times.

But even though it is the end of times it is not the end of hope. It seems to me that our unique season, this season of Advent, gives us the luxury of a pause. A moment. Yes, I know, and I lament the consumerization of this season. But for us perhaps the contrast is even more striking: The world is shopping, partying, wondering how to pay bills and who's going to invite Aunt Agatha to Christmas dinner and what if Uncle Harvey brings up politics at the table and is Cousin Louie still drinking and oh, Lordy, where did I hide the Christmas stockings.

And now we experience that holy pause. That moment when we remember: This. This is a season of anticipation. A season of hope. A season when we look up and look out at the hunger of the world, the world that *begs*, "Feed me" and we respond with hands and hearts.

My brothers and sisters, it's not yet time for "Silent Night" or even Alvin and the Chipmunks, no matter what the stores will tell you. No stable, no manger, no shepherds, no Magi. Those nights will come and we will sing our Glorias and our Alleluias. But now... it is the end of the world as we know it. Now, it is now time for the Kyrie: Lord, have mercy. Lord, teach us. Lord, lead us to open our hands, to be *your* hands and *your* heart and *your* voice. Christ, have mercy.

My dear friend Brother Karekin, BSG, wrote this: "In the midst of pain, offer solace. In the midst of fear, offer comfort. In the midst of loneliness, offer compassion. In doing so, we make straight the paths of Advent hope. The Holy One who calls us each by name will still save this seemingly broken world one heart beat at a time until peace and justice come. But it is the light of hope that we tend in our own hearts as the Body of Christ that cries out in the wilderness – Blessed is the One who comes. Let us clear a pathway!" [*Used by permission.*]

Take time. Take time to be quiet. Turn off the phone and step away from the computer. Be silent with an open heart. Experience the holy waiting time and then serve God. Because it is the end of the world and a better world will come.

God is watching us.

Amen.