



CHRISTIAN EDUCATION DEPARTMENT

A Devotion During This Time of the Coronavirus Pandemic First Sunday of Advent, November 29, 2020

Living Between the First and the Second

by Garland F. Pierce

Mark 13:24-37

13:24 "But in those days, after that suffering, the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light,

13:25 and the stars will be falling from heaven, and the powers in the heavens will be shaken.

13:26 Then they will see 'the Son of Man coming in clouds' with great power and glory.

13:27 Then he will send out the angels, and gather his elect from the four winds, from the ends of the earth to the ends of heaven.

13:28 "From the fig tree learn its lesson: as soon as its branch becomes tender and puts forth its leaves, you know that summer is near.

13:29 So also, when you see these things taking place, you know that he is near, at the very gates.

13:30 Truly I tell you, this generation will not pass away until all these things have taken place.

13:31 Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.

13:32 "But about that day or hour no one knows, neither the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father.

13:33 Beware, keep alert; for you do not know when the time will come.

13:34 It is like a man going on a journey, when he leaves home and puts his slaves in charge, each with his work, and commands the doorkeeper to be on the watch.

13:35 Therefore, keep awake--for you do not know when the master of the house will come, in the evening, or at midnight, or at cockcrow, or at dawn,

13:36 or else he may find you asleep when he comes suddenly.

13:37 And what I say to you I say to all: Keep awake."

This Sunday is the First Sunday of Advent. It marks the beginning of the liturgical year. Happy New Year! Many have lamented loudly and boldly declared that they are ready to bid farewell to 2020. Many even laugh at the utterance of the word "unprecedented" because everything, everywhere has seemed unprecedented—the magnitude, the change, the division, the loss, and the grief. We are trying to survive! We are trying to breathe! We are trying to live!

Similar to this "unprecedented" time of pandemic, the season of Advent forces us to consider how we are living and how we shall live. Advent forces us to exist in the between time—somewhere between the present and the not yet—in between Christ's first coming to the world as Emmanuel-God with us and his promised second coming at the end of time.

This passage from Mark's gospel also forces us to think about how we are living. It speaks of signs in nature and the end times which can come at any time. Ever since then, persons have set out to predict and proclaim the unpredictable and the "unproclaimable"—the exact time of Jesus' return. Our time is limited; there is no way around that fact of life. Our time is unpredictable—this time last Advent, most of us had no idea that 2020 would be as "unprecedented" as it has been. In light of the limited and unpredictable nature of life, Mark's gospel advises that we instead focus on living. How shall we live in this time between Christ's first, unprecedented arrival in the world and his second, unprecedented return with "the Son of Man coming in clouds with great power and glory?" We must work! We must serve! We must pay attention to the signs while not being so preoccupied with trying to figure out the date! Living in this meantime requires God-inspired discernment which allows us to figure out what we cannot do (like know the time of the second coming) and what we can (respond to the times in which we find ourselves). Like John Wesley, the founder of Methodism, said:

Do all the good you can, by all the means you can, in all the ways you can, in all the places you can, at all the times you can, to all the people you can, as long as ever you can.

Advent teaches us to keep awake!

TALK: Take a moment to be silent, reflect, and share (write down)—Reflecting on the scripture and on John Wesley's quote, what are you inspired to do this Advent?

PRAY:

Gracious God, you are the God of Advent. You always come—when we call you, when we need you, when we seek you. But we do not always know when or how or through whom you shall come. If we ever needed you before, we sure do need you now, so Come, O Come, Emmanuel! We are waiting; we are watching; we are doing what we can. We are keeping awake. In the name of the one who has come and will come again, we pray, **Amen.**

ACT:

1. Based on your reflections from the TALK section, make an Advent action plan as to how you will respond with your next most faithful step (big or small). Do what you can, help others and

yourself by practicing social distancing as much as possible, washing your hands often, and wearing face covering to help prevent the spread of COVID-19—See: <http://www.amechealth.org>.

2. See also the activity that accompanies this devotion.

3. Check out some other Advent Resources for worship and study:

AMEC Publishing House (Sunday School Union). <http://www.iamame.org/worship-resources-2/>

Advent Daily Devotional from the AME, AMEZ, and CME Departments of Christian Education (Kindle version):

https://www.amazon.com/gp/product/B08M6FGLHC?pf_rd_r=VVMNB09AMKMDNH1EDGJS&pf_rd_p=40eb7df6-3345-4945-93b1-96c5bd9a116d

Song:

O Come, O Come, Emmanuel
AMEC Hymnal, #102

1. O come, O come, Em-man-u-el,
And ran-som cap-tive Is-ra-el,
That mourns in lone-ly ex-ile here
Un-til the Son of God ap-pear.

Refrain: Re-joice! Re-joice! Em-man-u-el Shall come to thee, O Is-ra-el!

2. O come, Thou Day-spring, come and cheer
Our spir-its by Thine ad-vent here;
Dis-perse the gloom-y clouds of night,
And death's dark shad-ows put to flight.

Refrain

3. O come, Thou Key of Da-vid, come,
And o-pen wide our heaven-ly home;
Make safe the way that leads on high,
And close the path to mis-er-y.

Refrain

Alternative Arrangement: O Come, O Come, Emmanuel by Richard Smallwood with Vision:

<https://youtu.be/5c4qHt5SBSE>

Physical space—You may wish to create a dedicated space for your time of devotion. You may choose to place a candle, bible, and special symbols or material/fabric to help you focus and center during this time of reflection and prayer.

If you use this meditation and exercise in a time of family or group devotion, share in the leadership; allow different persons to read or lead different parts of this meditation.



The Christian Education Department will continue to develop resources that can be used as times of personal and collective devotion and study during this pandemic to help us all sustain and strengthen our faith and resolve.