

***An Advent Invitation***

**Advent 1B, Mark 13:24-37, Isaiah 64:1-9**

**Grace Church Newton**

**December 3, 2023**

THIS IS A DRAFT TEXT OF THE SERMON. IT MAY VARY FROM THE PRESENTED VERSION. PLEASE EXCUSE TYPOS AND GRAMMATICAL ERRORS, AND DO NOT CITE WITHOUT PERMISSION.

*In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.*

We are a very wordy people. It takes us sixteen pages just to worship together! The Book of Common prayer offers no fewer than one thousand pages to help us pray! Our daily lives are filled with words and information and data. Today, as we enter a new season in our life together as church, I invite us to experience this new season in a different way.

Today is the first Sunday of Advent – Happy Advent! – a time of preparation and reflection, an invitation to slow down, to listen, to let ourselves be drawn into the deepening of the seasons. We all come to this season – this time of reflection – from different circumstances, with different concerns, different daily obligations and activities, at different stages of life, with different fears, and hopes and dreams. Despite our various circumstances, in this season of Advent, I invite us into a common question: Where is God? Where is God in this?

Even before we moved into this season according to the calendar, Advent had been coming to find me. In these past few weeks, as I – like so many of you – have been flying through my days, trying to take care of far more than any one person could attend to – I have occasionally found myself stopped in my tracks, with this question coming to mind: Where is God? Where is God in this? To what end am I rushing and running about?

As we enter into this season together, if you have not already decided on an Advent practice for yourself – and, perhaps, even if you have – I invite us into this question: Where is God in this?

The season of Advent prepares us to celebrate the incarnation. God made flesh and dwelling among humans. We are preparing to mark and celebrate the physical, the incarnational, the relational nature of God. And so with this in mind, I invite all of us into an Advent in which we quiet our bodies to sense God’s presence, in which we listen for God’s call, in which we open our eyes to become aware of God appearing in the world around us. In short, I invite us, in this season of anticipation of the incarnation of God, to open ourselves to the bodily experience of God in our world.

So, as we ask this question – where is God in this? – as we wait for God with our senses – what if we added this twist? What would it be like to open ourselves to this question not with our analytical brains, our organizational / operational / critical faculties, but – in the same way that God came into this world: Through our senses? Through our experiences? Through our interactions and relationships?

We are a people of the book. We are a wordy, often analytically-minded people. Which is powerful. AND, the experience of God made human lives beyond words. So, perhaps in these weeks of preparation, we can find other ways – more expansive ways – to wonder “Where is God?”

Perhaps there is a piece of music that draws you out of yourself and toward God. In recent weeks, for example, I have been drawn to this odd , quirky little piece of music – “Little Garden” – by a young artist named Ayla Nereo who accompanies herself on the harp.

*“Breathe, everything’s changing,” she sings.  
“Breathe, the spell’s been broken  
We’ve been running far too fast, too long  
All life is calling for a moment now to breathe...”*

She continues:

*“This is the path for which you were born  
These are the times for which you were made...”*

*“Listen to your heart, grow a little garden  
Feed the ones around you with your love...  
“Breathe, and all the ones around you  
You remind them to breathe.” [\[Source\]](#)*

Recently, this has been a way for me to be reminded to open myself to God present in our world. Music. Perhaps a piece is speaking to you these days, too.

Or perhaps you’re called by nature and the beauty to be found in this transitional season. Perhaps attending to your physical surroundings may be part of your Advent practice. Noticing. In my back yard, for example, even though the last of the leaves have fallen and the perennials have all been cut back, and what was left of the ground cover is already being munched on by hungry rabbits – I noticed this week that the hellebores are blooming. It’s not supposed to happen until the spring, but there they are, offering a sign of continuing life in an otherwise barren garden.

Or maybe intentional, reflective time is the experience that opens you to God in our world. Perhaps not words, so much as a candle...or breath...or movement...or simply sitting...and saying, "For this time, however brief, I am here."

This is a special time of the year. The combination of readings, hymns, the natural seasons, the anticipation of celebration, the reminders of God in human form in all of its vulnerability – there is an invitation in this time. It's easy to let the mystery and the magic of this season slip past in our understandably busy days.

I realized as I pulled together these thoughts that I was grateful for the fact that all of us expected me to show up with something to say this morning. Because otherwise, this first day of the Advent season could have come and gone without me actually reflecting on where we are in this moment.

All our days are busy, perhaps especially in this season. If it's available to you, even in unexpected moments throughout the day, won't you join me in opening ourselves to the miraculous ways that God can shine through?

Advent blessings to you all.

Amen.