

Mark tells us: “But 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....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. “

A pretty scary scene, right? Yet, in the stark reality of 2020, not unimaginable. Every part of us has been challenged just as this scripture challenges our faith. Perhaps, it is time to reshape our notion of a God whose sole activity is to comfort and protect...and to remember the God who purifies and perfects in order to heal what is broken. This is the God who comes after all the suffering; the one who re=creates all of creation.

2020 is a good time to ask: What happens when the earth and heavens are shaken and the center of our worship – our temple built by grandparents and great-grandparents becomes dangerous to our lives in the here and now – and challenges our faith about the time to come?

We are sorely handicapped if we think that God operates only within the temple on Henry St! Now more than ever we need to be able to perceive God working to prepare a new tomorrow....out there = in the world. Will we be frightened by this new world or have our senses become dull and we are blind. Are we unable to keep our eyes open to watch for God’s unveiling and to recognize it as it comes? Finally, as the new tomorrow is unveiled, are we able to trust God?

Hidden things can be dangerous: not just a virus that flies through the air and claims victims young and old, but also the virus of evil – persistent injustice, unpredictable violence, nagging hunger. In the times ahead, the underbelly of our broken world, the dirty laundry of our dysfunctional human family will be revealed – raging, insistent and frightening. COVID is killing us – but no more than a society where the milk of human kindness is reserved for a chosen class or race and curdles in the mouths of outsiders, outcasts and ‘others’. God is revealing the virus of evil that infects our world.

When chaos and destruction come our way, we may wonder where God is. When ritual and piety are no longer available and **all** our temples are destroyed: will you still claim this God as Creator and Redeemer?

So what do we do in these times? Many are putting up our Christmas trees early, stringing light to chase the darkness. We immerse ourselves in an endless loop of secular holiday music to paper over the ugliness of our divisiveness and the rot of our culture.

Congregations are begging to sing Christmas carols so they can immerse themselves in the candle light of a sentimental scene – rather than slog our way through the painful work of preparing ourselves and this world for our Lord's return – for the triumph of Jesus which will be the healing and salvation of the world.

Yet, Glory lies beyond what we know – somewhere on the other side. We have known the incarnate Jesus for centuries. Now we risk sleeping through the glorious finale. If we have learned anything in 2020 we have learned that God is not in the temple, God is not confined to the manger: Jesus must be on the cross before we see him in the resurrection. The sacraments of the church continue each day in acts of mercy and generosity, in the rituals of feeding and housing strangers.

Advent is a time of coming: God rushing towards us with a new future, a new tomorrow inviting us to go deeper than a baby born centuries ago. ...to cut through the sentimentality of quaint ornaments made of glitter and glue.

We are no longer 5 year olds unable to sleep, longing for the Advent of presents. **WE** are disciples waiting and watching in the Garden of Gethsemane – about to see God's incomprehensible plan in Jesus unfold in a cross and a new birth. **We are not listening for a sweet lullaby but for the summons of a trumpet.**

And, Our place is not beside a fake manger in a sanitized stable. Instead we stand with those **whose only hope in this world is the world and the Savior to come**, when heaven and earth are ripped open and the Savior comes with

trumpet sound. Then shall the outcast and unwanted know life, and it will be unending.

There are no diagrams or detailed . We wait without explanations, **only a promise that he will come again**. All that is evil has not passed away, yet the **promise that it will** lives on. We do not know the time or the place, we **know the one who is coming**. We stand in darkness now, **and we wait for the coming light**.

We have set aside four weeks to concentrate on our preparations: to immerse ourselves in prayer and acts of mercy and kindness. We have four weeks to hone our skills of watching and doing the work of the coming Savior. We have four weeks to make the path straight for the coming one to truly reign in our lives.

Four weeks....Before we are plunged once again into the icy waters of reality with a baby who needs feeding and changing, who deprives us of sleep and costs us a good portion of our budget. We prepare by caring for the innocent, vulnerable, unknown ones born in the back alleys of our communities – for it in those manglers, we will find the promised Jesus.

Come, let us Prepare ye the way of the Lord.