

First Sunday of Advent - Year B

Isaiah 63:16-17; 64:1, 4-8; 1Corinthians 1:3-9; Mark 13:33-37

Ever since the pandemic we have been put on high alert. Every day, we hear the latest spikes in new coronavirus cases. As shared on Hawaii News Now, “Hawaii reported 120 new COVID cases on Thanksgiving Day.” On Black Friday we learned of 97 new cases.”

In a world stricken with fear, we now live our lives on full alert. We are constantly reminded to beware of social gatherings, be cautious of the health dangers from the virus, avoid close contact with others, and stay home and do not attend high risk events such as parties or indoor activities.

Today’s Gospel teaches us to be watchful, too, not watchful for trouble, but watchful for triumph, not anticipating destruction or illness, but awaiting in joyful hope.

“Be watchful! Be alert! ... You do not know when the Lord of the house is coming, whether in the evening or at midnight, or at cockcrow, or in the morning,” Jesus tells us. “Watch!”

Dear sisters and brothers in Christ:

Today we begin Advent, the first season of the new Church Year. And we are once again asked to get ready and prepare for the “coming of the Lord”.

In one respect, we are invited to look back two thousand years, the moment when our God came into our world in the person of Jesus.

Once again we look forward to celebrating his miraculous birth in a tiny town, in a far off place, to a woman of no particular worldly importance. But that’s not the whole picture.

First Sunday of Advent - Year B

Isaiah 63:16-17; 64:1, 4-8; 1Corinthians 1:3-9; Mark 13:33-37

During Advent we are also asked to prepare ourselves for the coming of the Lord at the end of time -- the day when Jesus will return in glory to judge the living and the dead. And of course, that day, that time is completely unknown to us.

And so we are told to be watchful and alert, lest he come and find us "asleep". Advent -- a holy season in which we look back and look forward at the same time.

Yet, that's not the whole picture either.

You see, in a very real sense, Advent is also about preparing for something that is already happening. It's about getting ready for something that is occurring right now. It's about being watchful and alert for something that is unfolding in this very time and place.

For Advent is really about preparing to meet our Lord and God who is already in our midst, already among us, already meeting us over and over and over again. Do we notice? Can we see Him? Do we believe that we are encountering him all the time --- in situations and circumstances, in friends and enemies, and even within ourselves?

It takes faith to believe that God is all around us and within us. And so a big part of Advent is preparing our hearts to receive God and give "birth" to Him in new ways.

Advent is also about preparing our minds to be illuminated by him so we can think through some of the difficulties and challenges of life with wisdom and compassion and understanding.

First Sunday of Advent - Year B

Isaiah 63:16-17; 64:1, 4-8; 1Corinthians 1:3-9; Mark 13:33-37

It's about preparing our eyes to see as God sees -- so that we will be able to find Him in each person, recognizing the blessings, seeing the goodness and kindness all around us, and finding hope and promise despite the difficulties of life.

This past week as we prepared for Thanksgiving, a donor contributing meals for our kupuna shared a "chicken skin" experience. The day before the pick up of the meals, the manager of the restaurant called her and said in gratitude to God he was donating the 25 turkey dinners she ordered.

In the midst of the pandemic when businesses are struggling financially, a story like this exemplifies the goodness and kindness of God through ones actions. As people of faith, we are invited to do the same.

We are to see the living God right in our midst and encounter our God who comes to us every minute of every day.

That's one of the things we are invited to watch for and be alert for this Advent. We don't have to wait until the end of our lives to see God. Nor do we simply recall how he came to us long ago.

No -- We can see God this very day. We can see God in each person. We can see God in every joy, every accomplishment, and in every good thing. And we can even encounter God in the challenges and sorrows and messiness of life too.

May this holy season help us to do precisely that.

Be watchful! Be alert!