

A Sermon for 1st Sunday of Advent

December 1, 2024



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Click Here for today's Readings:

[First Sunday of Advent – The Episcopal Church](#)

1 Thessalonians 3:9-13, Luke 21:25-36

Subversive Advent

Paul has written a very gentle message to his friends in Thessalonica. In our second reading today, we hear these beautiful words: “May the Lord make you increase and abound in love for one another and for all, just as we abound in love for you. And may he so strengthen your hearts in holiness that you may be blameless before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all his saints.”

I think we need this gentle message to balance the Gospel reading, which is ferocious. Hey! It’s Advent! Why all the scary talk from Jesus?

If we thought Advent was a time of preparation for Sweet Baby Jesus coming at Christmas, we’d best rethink that. We will indeed celebrate Christ’s First

Coming on December 25. But Advent is really a time of preparation for the Second Coming, and it starts today, the first of four Sundays, shaking us up. Jesus speaks to his disciples in words of warning: “People will faint from fear and foreboding of what is coming upon the world, for the powers of the heavens will be shaken.”

So, all shaken up. I spoke this week with a clergy friend, Eric Law, who lives in Los Angeles. He said living in an earthquake-prone area, he often experiences shaking of the ground, usually lasting about 30 seconds. Californians are used to it, but somehow they are always waiting to see if it goes on for more than 30 seconds – is this the next big one? It always presents foreboding.

We are in the process of a shake up right now in many ways, and it behooves us to pay attention, to be wary, to stay alert.

Our secular society loves Advent but celebrates this time somewhat differently from church folks. They are out shopping, having parties, wrapping presents, eating a lot of sweets, planning for a big family feast, and listening to The Little Drummer Boy. I welcome the secular celebration.

I have come to accept this frantic observance as a valid way to celebrate this time of year, if you don't have Jesus. It's OK. However, for us church folk, the observance of these 24 days is a little different. We are more likely to be quiet, spiritual, and filled with holy anticipation. Maybe we do a little of both ways.

There are meaningful practices we can adopt during the next 24 days, to keep us attuned to what the Advent season is really about. To keep focus, we have some timekeepers. One of the most popular is the Advent wreath. The four candles count off the four Sundays of Advent, and we light one, cumulatively, each week, until all four are bringing us the light of Christ. If you have an Advent wreath, be sure to light it up.

Norm and I light up our Advent chicken (yes, it is a fanciful Don Drumm Advent display in the shape of a chicken – perhaps another way of saying Wake Up!) – anyway, we light it up every day (not just Sundays) during our morning devotions. This sometimes means lots of candles after 24 days, but it is a meaningful devotion. I'm sure you all have times of devotion and prayer, but how about ramping it up this Advent? Add some devotional pamphlets – there are lots in parlor – read Forward Day by Day and notice the scripture references at the top of each page. Practice ways to keep in touch with loved ones – perhaps letters, perhaps Christmas cards, perhaps phone calls. Let them know you love them. Find ways to be generous – I know you do that all the time, and you have embraced our outreach projects here so beautifully. Try adding another – contribute to a local effort or respond to an appeal through the mail. What speaks to you most loudly? Doctors Without Borders? Salvation Army? I'm sure you receive many appeals all through this season. Pick one (or more).

And pray. Pray for those less fortunate. Pray for the world, the nation, the Church, our parish. And pray for peace. Our Advent Chicken has a subversive message on it. Even though the cock crows rather blatantly, to wake us up, the bird of peace is a gentle dove. Can you see it? Subtlety on the side? I began this homily by quoting St Paul's message to the Thessalonians, an appeal for love and peace. The appeal is always subtle, quiet, and subversive. It is hidden in all the loudness and craziness that

secular society chooses to celebrate. Let us be quieter, subversive, and pray for love and peace.