

Advent 1
27 November 2011

Isaiah 64:1-9
Psalm 80:1-7, 17-19
1 Corinthians 1:3-9
Mark 13:24-37
Year B

I.N.I.

The great 17th century poet John Milton lost his sight, and wrote about it in what's called "On His Blindness." He wonders what's the use, what's the purpose when as he says *my life is spent Ere half my days in this dark world and wide.*

Patience personified teaches him his lesson, concluding *they also serve who only stand and wait.*

This waiting is an Advent posture. It's not an easy position to take, when life screams by, and the stream of American Advent Advertising says hurry up, buy now, get it before time runs out, save today, the holidays are here.

This scurrying to fill up is premature, I say.

Blowing one's wad, as in wallet, as in credit card debt, as in what I ate for Thanksgiving, as in one too many office parties, dismisses the *dark world and wide* that Milton muses about.

We instead feed our addictions for products that promise an end to our longing but only disappoint. We anesthetize ourselves with trimmings and the rage for perfectionism, only to discover that we can't have it all, the American dream is a sham, and the bright lights blinking and multi-colored only hide the darkness within.

What if we agreed that we are all in the dark? What if we breathed a collective sigh and called out in the nighttime of our souls, "Oh that you would tear open the heavens and come down?"

This is the Advent posture, without anesthesia, cold turkey, soberly assessing the sorry state of being.

Waiting...for God....to come.

In the 2004 animated movie *The Incredibles*, due to excessive damage caused by superhero Mr. Incredible, all superheroes have to re-integrate into society. Mr. Incredible, also known as Bob, is a cog in an insurance company and unhappy with his lot. When he drives home in a car that barely fits his massive physique, the car sputters

into the driveway. Bob gets out and closes the door, but it pops open. He closes it more firmly. It pops open again. He then slams it and with his superhero strength inadvertently released, he breaks the door. In his rage, he grabs car and sinks his hands into it, lifts it in the air ready to smash it into smithereens when he spots the next-door-neighbor kid popping gum on a tricycle. Bob gently puts the car down and says to the kids staring at him, "Well, what are you waiting for?" The kid says, "I don't know. Something amazing, I guess." Bob says, "Me too, kid."

<http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0317705/quotes?qt=qt0361975>

I'd like your agreement that in this Advent, we will be in this waiting business together. I'd like to know that we can be in the dark together, lighting one candle at a time, calling out to God for mercy, for some sense of assurance, to come and restore us.

In this posture we are in good company. The Israelites returning to the rubble after exile wondered what the heck happened. Time and time again they thought God was playing hide and seek, and that it was God who was hiding. So they called out, *olly olly oxen free, God show your face. Do something amazing, like you did in the past. Don't sit on your throne and let the world careen into oblivion.*

The congregation at Corinth was cosmopolitan, and diverse. The coastal city where they lived, was used to merchants and shoppers coming and going. The people considered themselves pretty sophisticated in faith, particularly some who considered themselves something like spiritual superheroes (with Ph D's in Spirituality, no doubt). St. Paul needed to give them a reality check, so he wrote them a letter, particularly reminding them that they are not as bright as they thought they were, and that all, whether PhD's or not, had what they needed to be a community in Christ.

So while the Corinthians assumed the posture of waiting, Paul assures them that they "are not lacking in any spiritual gift." And in case they were wondering where the heck God was, Paul reminds them that "God is faithful; by him [he says] you were called into the fellowship of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord."

Here we are in the dark, together, lighting one candle at a time. Into the uncertain economic, emotional, and spiritual climate of our days here at Bethesda, as we wonder where the heck God is, we might be reminded that we are given gifts of a spirit-filled community. All have something to share. And in the moments of utter grief, while we are thrown to the ground, where we grope in the dark, we are in good company with Jesus, and those who seek to follow him.

In this year's journey with Jesus through the Gospel of Mark we will certainly be thrown out of kilter. Hearing the gospel of Mark is like riding on a roller coaster, climbing the amazing heights, only to lose your bearings and be thrown down toward oblivion. We begin near the end where Jesus' words throw us topsy turvey as he describes blackout in the sky and those who are to watch warned not to fall asleep. In that crazy mixed up world scenario, Jesus says the Human One, the Son of Man will come.

“God, save us,” we cry. And Jesus, God’s amazing representative, comes down. Jesus goes to the places where fear freezes and offers mercy. Jesus goes to the places that are cursed and blesses. Jesus goes to the places where we go to hide from our troubles, and says *olly olly oxen free*, even from the place of death.

Advent blessings, dear company of friends at Bethesda. Thank you for your posture of receiving mercy with hands open for bread and mouths open for wine, the hiddenness of God made visible in the sacrament of promise. Thank you for your posture of welcome to those who feel as if they are in the dark. There’s room in the dark for more. And as we wonder and cry, ***Come, Lord Jesus***, we can breathe a sigh of relief with wise John Milton who was reassured by Patience personified who said *they also serve who only stand and wait*.

I.N.I.