

First Sunday of Advent - November 27 -- "Best Case Apocalypse"

On Monday evening our youth and a few adults listened to the band "Best Case Apocalypse" perform here in the sanctuary.

I like their name "Best Case Apocalypse" - but what does it mean?

Did anyone in the audience know?

The word "**apocalypse**" means simply a "*tearing away*," a removal of the veil to allow us to see the future. Apocalypse is a revelation, uncovering of our future with God.

For example, the last book of the bible, the Revelation of St. John, is an apocalypse - but maybe not the best case apocalypse, since there are plagues, hail, and fire mixed with blood.

Our lessons for the first Sunday in Advent are apocalyptic, poetic speech pushed to the limit in an attempt to render a radically changed future. In this Sunday's gospel, Mark chapter 13, we get a *best case apocalypse*. In the end, cosmic fireworks in the sky: a darkened sun, a dim moon, stars falling from the sky like sparks from a sparkler. Those images may seem threatening to us, but they're not intended to evoke fear, but faith. This is not a horror story, but a hopeful story. Such portents are described as signs that the Son of Man, this powerful, divine figure, the risen and glorified Christ "is near." Jesus will come again in power and great glory.

By entering this new church year under a shower of stars falling from heaven, we are given a vision we may not rush to embrace, but one that provides us with an antidote to the sentimentality of the season.

While Christmas trees pop up all over town and Carols fill the airwaves, we are given a different vision of the coming Lord. For this week, we can forget the stable, the star, the shepherds keeping watch over their flock by night.

Yes, it's a good thing to re-joyce in this good news of Jesus' birth every year; but we need also to be reminded that God will wrap up the human experience on terrestrial earth in the Lord's own time and own way.

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"I'm looking for another place to work," his friend said.

"Really? I thought you were happy there,"

"Well, I was happy enough. But yesterday, my boss came in, so excited, and said to me, 'Boy, come over here. You won't believe what I got yesterday! You are going to be green with envy,' and stuff like that. Then he pulled out a picture of a big, new car! And he plopped that picture down on my desk and said, 'Eat your heart out. That's what I'll be driving from now on.'

I stood there stunned at the silliness of this man. His life was actually made better, he really had a good reason to go on living, because he got this car! Then he said to me, 'Kid, if you keep your nose to the grindstone, one day you can get to be like me.' He turned and left my office.

Those words stuck in my brain. 'One day you will be like me.'

I thought to myself, 'Great! One day I'll actually look like you. I'll have no greater point to my life than to get some car and think that gives me a life worth living.' It was for me

an awakening, a moment when everything came into focus. I'm getting out of this job, leaving this office, getting as much distance between me and him as I can. God help me if I ever grow up to be like him!"

It was an awakening. We must be able to imagine something better than merely present arrangements. Meaning for life is more than a new car.

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Since the economy went south, bringing financial crisis and hard times, we seem to instinctively become unsure and uncertain about the future. No longer are we confident about what tomorrow holds. When the future seems uncertain, we are impressed by *how little control we have of the future*, how frail and vulnerable that we are. *Perhaps, in such a time, we need to focus on who holds tomorrow.*

These Advent texts announce to us that the future is not solely in our hands. By the grace of God, there is hope for more than merely present arrangements. We have seen the future and it is, by God's intervention, considerably more open than we first thought. God is rending the heavens and coming down to us. This is the hope of Advent -- hope for the future. Christ is coming.

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More than a century ago, archeologist de Sautola was searching for prehistoric artifacts in the cave at Altamira in France. For years he had been studying the floor of the ancient cave, but he had found little of value. One day he went there accompanied by his young daughter. His daughter, on that first visit, looked up. Suddenly she called out to him, "*Look, Papa, oxen!*" He, too looked up and there he discovered the famous Paleolithic cave paintings. He never suspected that the cave walls were a canvas for our ancient ancestors.

Sometimes the most important feature of hope is its ability to look upwards - to look away from our daily routine - to look up and beyond with hope.

The insistent message of Advent is -- don't settle for less than the full power of God Immanuel, Christ always with us -- so there is always hope for something better than what is before us in the present.

Tomorrow may not be exclusively in our hands, and knowing that can make a huge difference in how you live today.

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That's the point of the parable Jesus told about the man gone on a journey. His servants do not know where he has gone or when he will return. He may have the day marked on his pocket calendar, but he has, for his own reasons, decided not to share that information with his staff. Instead, he has put them in charge. He has given them all their own work to do, and then he has disappeared with one last command to be on the watch.

Anyone who has been in a similar situation knows how delicious those first few moments are. The whole house is yours. You can eat and drink what you want, leave your clothes lying all over the master bedroom if you want.

The choice is yours, but that work you were given to do is going to start nagging at you after a while. The unwatered plants are going to turn brown, while the cupboard grows

bare and the dust balls get larger. Sooner or later you are going to have to decide what to do about it.

The paradox of the parable is that it tells us to watch, while at the same time it tells us we have jobs to do. Maybe it doesn't seem possible to do both at once, but on the other hand, perhaps doing our jobs is the way of watching. As we weed the garden the way the master showed us, as we treat one another the way he treated us, feed the animals in our care along with the strangers who come to the door - as we do unto others as he did unto us - we are watching for him until he comes.

The way Jesus described it, this is a world in which nothing could be taken for granted. The Lord could be anywhere, in anyone. If you went to sleep, you might wake up to find Christ standing over you saying, "Where were you when I arrived? I thought I told you to watch out for me."

"Therefore, keep awake," Jesus says, "for you do not know when the master of the house will come, in the evening, or at midnight, or at dawn, or else he may find you asleep when he comes suddenly. And what I say to you I say to all: Keep awake" (13: 35-37).

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Stay awake! Stay conscious! As hard as it is, as long as it takes, keep at it -- do the job I entrusted to you - keep serving - keep loving.

As a bumper sticker put it:

Jesus is coming – Look busy

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It sure looks like the old, conventional, predictable world. You have the same problems in front of you, the same challenges. And yet, we're *aware that something's afoot, awake to some new reality beyond the present arrangements. Tomorrow is not be exclusively in our hands, and knowing that can make a huge difference in how you live today.*

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We need Advent to call us to remind us that **we are servants** of the king – and he has **expectations** of us.

He left us in charge with jobs to do.

“Are you ready to meet your Lord?”

Live your faith everyday as if you had to **give an account** to the Lord **tonight** for your words and deeds -- *and give that account in prayer tonight*

- and every night until you stand before Him.

Then you're ready and may **expectantly - joyfully**

look forward to Christ's return

on that morning when the stars begin to fall.