

“It’s Sufficient”

**Isaiah 64:1-9; Mark 13: 24-37
Advent 1-Year B**

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From the Pulpit

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Prayer for Illumination: Guide us in these Advent days,
O God, and by the power of your Holy Spirit,
illumine these words so that we may hear
what you have for us this day. Amen.

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Today we begin anew. We begin anew, with a clean slate and breath of fresh air we turn our liturgical calendars, and change the colors in the Sanctuary, set up the Advent wreath and candles and prepare for the birth of Jesus.

There really wasn’t a choice when it came to a sermon series theme for Advent, Home for Christmas. I’ll be honest with you, Tim and I have a difference of opinion about the world’s greatest Christmas song. Even with crooners like Bing Crosby or Michael Buble, “I’ll be home for Christmas,” comes in just in front of “Grandma Got Run Over by a Reindeer.”

The song is sappy, sentimental. It also sets up some pretty unreasonable expectations of the weather. Also, it gives the illusion of a perfect family with the perfect family Christmas complete with Instagram worthy presents.

I’ll admit this song does have a certain poignancy.

I mean, I don’t know about you, but where else are we going to be? It is 2020. There’s a countywide stay at home order because of a raging pandemic of Covid-19! We’ll be home for Christmas alright. We don’t have a choice.

(Emily Sings)

*We'll be home for Christmas, where else would we be.
We're prepared for vaccine care and life that is mask-free.*

*Christmas Eve you'll find me, on your laptop screen.
I'll be home for Christmas, on a sanitizing spree.¹*

O Christmas 2020 – You will be memorable.

This year if you started sentences with “We were hoping to...” or “I was planning on...” at any point---you were soon shaken out of your cheery mood.

When we look back on the year, maybe we'll reminisce about the things we missed out on. What wasn't there? Who wasn't there? The things we did without.

Or maybe we'll share what an odd and weird time this really was.

Maybe, we'll take the opportunity to share what we learned in this year about the world, about others, about ourselves.

Maybe we'll share that the image of perfect is hard to come by.

Take what was deemed the most “perfect” Christmas Tree being set up in Fountain Square in Cincinnati. On second look, the 65 foot Norwegian Spruce, looks like a few of us---misshapen and a bit bedraggled.

One spectator who saw it thought, “I honestly didn't know a tree could look like that.” Another person thought Cincinnati's tree represents us all: “It's doing the best it can.”²

Even when all spruced up (pun intended), it's still just a little off. Perhaps this year it's the model of Pandemic Perseverance.

This year's scraggly tree is doing the best it can, just like all of us.

In the past, when I preach on the First Sunday of Advent, I think the texts in the lectionary are a bit out there. It's hard to put into present day words the apocalyptic events portrayed here. But, it's 2020 and our texts this morning seem to strike the right chord.

In the texts the world is in crisis. Usually that claim asks us to make quite a leap of imagination. But not this year. Our world IS in crisis: Global pandemic. Hospitals full

to overcapacity. Fires. Hurricanes. Floods. Things aren't good. The text acknowledges that.

In this morning's reading, stars are falling from the sky.

The text acknowledges the strange reality we are living in this Advent Season.

This year has brought into view the fragility of the lives we have made for ourselves and reminded us painfully that we are not, on our own, sufficient to the challenges of life in this world.

Isaiah's cry – "Oh that you would tear open the heavens and come down!" – is our cry, even if we have a hard time giving it voice. Isaiah's plea to God is as simple as it is stark: *Show up and do something!*⁶

Which is where Mark's intentional re-telling of Jesus' apocalyptic parable points the way. There are certainly nods to the "end times" in Jesus' message that God will come at some point to right all wrongs, settle all accounts, and restore the creation.

So when, according to Mark, will day and hour of God's unveiling and appearance be? Not so much at the end of time, but at the cross, in the hidden and expected unveiling of God's greatest work.

In that small and broken figure of Jesus on the cross, God was at work, rending to pieces all that would divide us from God, closing the gap between what we deserve and what God wants to give us, promising to be with us and for us in and through all things.

Maybe God, yet again, will come this year, amidst the bedraggled and scraggly places of our lives and of this world and do God's best work.

Coming to turn the world aright, to bring down the corrupt, and to let the oppressed go free – that's the work this season.

In Advent we know things aren't as they are supposed to be. There are times when uncertainty and mystery can't be explained away.

This text reminds us that this isn't a new experience. The not knowing. The not having all the pieces.

This reading feels so relevant to us, more relevant than it has ever been. The sky is falling in and no one really knows what's going to happen. So, then what are we to do?

Jesus has words of wisdom for such a moment.

“Keep Alert”

“Stay Awake”

“Pay attention”

Our modern day would call that mindfulness.

It's about paying attention. Living in present reality which is the only reality there is. Jesus invites us to look at what's right in front of us. See God at work in what is happening here. Now. Here. Now.

The text cautions against sinking into nostalgia – the past was better than the present and I would like to go back. It also warns against too much speculation about what we hope will be a rosier future. That takes us out of this present moment.

And Jesus wants us to be in the present moment. Alert for signs of God's presence.⁴

Maybe as we find our way in this season maybe we'll go overboard on the decorations, or the presents or the cookies, or those inflatable lawn ornaments because of all the things we didn't get a chance to do. Maybe we'll see the things that we hold so closely, that stress us out, that cause undo angst and worry. Maybe we will focus on different things and as we do, remember the small things that make this season memorable.

Whatever our usual (and admittedly at times over-the-top) preparations for Christmas, fundamentally Christmas is about small things, a baby, his parents, bottom-of-the-economic ladder shepherds, wandering astrologers looking for someone to save the world, deep-held longings for presence and redemption given voice by Israel's prophets.

And this year, perhaps we'll to hear that promise more clearly: that whenever and wherever we act in love, God is present.

So indeed, watch, wait, look, and most especially listen, for in the Christ child who will grow up to embrace all of our longings and experience all aspects of our life, God is whispering, “Emmanuel, I am with you!”⁵

When we are most attentive to what is going on in our lives, not distracted from the busy-ness of this season. We can relax and tell an old story in a new way about the journey to the manger and the birth of a Savior. May we have more time for each other. More time for Jesus. More time for God.

Maybe we'll look at all that is around us, and to all of it say: "It's sufficient. That will do!"

All that we have now and all that we are – It's sufficient! It's enough. It will be good enough for the one who is entering the world to make all things new. May you enter into this season deeply and keep awake, stay alert---to the most sufficient ways we can be in this time and in this place.

Amen.

¹ Revised Lyrics complements of Jeff Corzine, who loves this sort of thing

² <https://news.yahoo.com/cincinnati-christmas-tree-deemed-perfect>

³ David Lose. In the Meantime. <http://www.davidlose.net/2020/11/advent-1-b-small-things/>

⁴ Rev. Amy Miracle, "Good Enough Christmas" Sermon Working Group.(2020)

⁵ David Lose. In the Meantime. <http://www.davidlose.net/2020/11/advent-1-b-small-things/>