

Pastor Jon's Sunday, December 3, 2023. The first Sunday in Advent.

Title: "Is Advent Relevant Anymore in our World?" (I say it is)

Welcome to the first Weekend/Sunday in Advent. An "advent" is the arrival of a notable person, thing, or event. Think of the advent of television for example... and how it changed the world. I remember as a kid back in the 70's, I used to be my dad's remote control. "Jon, can get up and change the channel?" Amazingly, I never ran out of batteries.

In the beginning of the church year, which we call Advent, we enter a threefold season of waiting for the arrival of a notable person. We enter a time of waiting for Jesus in his second coming, of waiting to celebrate Jesus' birth at Christmas, and of waiting so see Christ's presence among us now.

And how good are we at waiting for anything? Not very good. We live in an immediate gratification world. If we can't afford it, we charge it. If it takes too long, we complain. Our 7 year old got an Advent calendar from Aldi and opened her first chocolate on Friday. She then proceeded to say, "Can open all of them?" No, you have to wait. During Advent, the church invites you to slow down and prepare to meet Christ anew, when everything about Christmas in our world is telling you to speed up and spend more.

Advent is also the season of lights. Just as we put up more and more Christmas lights in church, or on our houses or on Christmas trees, our Advent wreath in the church will get brighter and brighter every week. We expectantly wait to celebrate Jesus' coming down to earth as the light of the world that no darkness can overcome. As we experience more darkness in the Northern Hemisphere, the church gets brighter.

In what I wrote for the weekly informer email on Advent, I said that Advent is a penitential season, hence the blue color. It is a season to stop, take inventory of your life, and repent... to turn around... to have a change of heart or mind about something. To stop doing the things that aren't lifegiving for you or others around you. Like in Michael Jackson's song "Man in the Mirror": "I'm gonna make a

change, for once in my life, it's gonna feel real good, gonna make a difference, gonna make it right."

Advent is also a time for truth telling. Telling the truth about ourselves and the world around us. Things are not always OK. And that's OK. People are hurting. Our world is filled with darkness. With wars and innocent people dying, we wonder, where God is? In our first lesson from Isaiah 64 we experience this form of Lament saying, "Where are you, God?" As the Israelites returned from the exile in Babylon, their vision of a rebuilt Jerusalem and a renewed relationship with God was not coming to fruition. The prophet cried out to God, saying, "O that you would tear open the heavens and come down." Isn't this the Christmas story? God tearing open the heavens and coming down.

The Israelites were having a crisis of faith because God was hidden from them. The prophet said, "You have hidden your face from us, and have delivered us into the hand of our iniquity."

Yet at the end of this section they professed their abiding faith in God saying in verse 8, "Yet, O Lord, you are our Father, we are the clay, and you are our potter; we are the work of your hand." They were asking for a renewed relationship with God like a piece of clay that God could mold and shape. I love this image of God as potter and we as clay because this is what God's word can do for us... continually mold and shape us into what God calls us to be... and as Christians to be more Christlike in all our relationships.

In our Gospel, Mark gives us a vision of the end times when Jesus will return. And just like a fig tree will sprout leaves in the spring, it will be clear when the new dawn will come. After all the suffering, you will see signs like the sun darkened and stars falling from heaven. But about that day or hour, no one knows, neither the angels in heaven, nor the son, but only the Father.

So, the message from Jesus to us is to be ready at all times. To metaphorically keep awake. To some that means forgiving who you need to forgive, including yourselves. To say I love you to those closest to you. To pray for your enemies and those who persecute you. To seek justice for the most vulnerable among us. In the mini

parable Jesus tells, this time of waiting is meant to be a communal effort. Jesus says in verse 14, “It is like a man going on a journey, when he leaves home and puts his slaves in charge, each with his work, and commands the doorkeeper to be on watch.” Did you catch that, each has his or her work while we wait? What is your work during these in-between times of waiting for Jesus to return? Maybe we are the doorkeeper called to point out the presence of Jesus among us when we see it. Jesus is present when we have grace for each other. When we forgive each other. When love one another. When we eat together in communion.

May this Advent season invite you to slow down, bring needed changes in your life, and be fruitful work as we wait for Jesus to come again. Amen!