

When Lisa recently rearranged the preaching schedule and asked if I would preach Advent 1 rather than Advent 4, without hesitation I agreed. To be honest I glanced at the lectionary and read the Isaiah passage, which we heard this morning, and thought that would be a great reading for this homily. Then, later, I read the Gospel from Matthew and thought what have I gotten myself into. So, Thanks Lisa... I think.

In Greek the word apocalypse did not exclusively convey the meaning of end times, rather it conveyed the meaning of a revelation, or an unfolding of secret truths brought to light...and only brought to light in the unveiling. It is related to another Greek theological or philosophical term *Aletheia*, meaning disclosure, or truth as hiddenness. I understand it as truth as the unpeeling of an onion. So, when we think of apocalyptic language, or end times language, we can understand God's plan for humanity with a present, future and ending point juxtaposed together.

Confusing, yes. Advent invites us to live between the times....remembering the history of salvation and Jesus's presence with us, and at the same time paradoxically waiting with anticipation for the incarnation of Christ into the world and the perfection of the Beloved Community in both present and future time.

Likewise, the term prophet has interesting roots....it means one who speaks on behalf of a deity, a person capable of foreseeing future events, but also one who could speak of the past....our prophets, today both Isaiah and Matthew we believe spoke of both to implore us to make a profound correction in the present.

Our prophetic and poetic spiritual leaders often shake our worlds.... we have little desire to leave our comfortable spaces, our comfortable home or churches, or coffee shops to roam around the dark streets of the rougher parts of our cities. Prophetic artists, and poets can force us to look at those dark places we would otherwise not encounter.

I often read Bob Dylan as our contemporary Isaiah or Jeremiah, consider these images from A Hard Rain's going to fall, in today's news cycle:

Oh, what did you see, my blue-eyed son?  
 I saw a newborn baby with wild wolves all around it  
 I saw a highway of diamonds with nobody on it  
 I saw a black branch with blood that kept drippin'  
 I saw a room full of men with their hammers a-bleedin'  
 I saw ten thousand talkers whose tongues were all broken  
 I saw guns and sharp swords in the hands of young children

Isaiah's passage this morning clearly inspired MLK's mountain top speech, I have been to the mountain....

*I have a dream that one day this nation will rise up and live out the true meaning of its creed: "We hold these truths to be self-evident; that all men are created equal."*

*I have a dream today.*

*I have a dream that one day every valley shall be exalted, every hill and mountain shall be made low, the rough places will be made plain, and the crooked places will be made straight, and the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together.*

*Many peoples shall come and say, "Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob; that he may teach us his ways and that we may walk in his paths.*

*He shall judge between the nations and shall arbitrate for many peoples; they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore.*

Isaiah is dreaming and prophesying hope of a future time, not yet but soon, where Jerusalem, that city on the hill, will be a center of faithfulness, justice and righteousness and will draw the peoples of the world to its comfort where swords, or handguns, or AK47's will no longer be needed, and war, violence, and discrimination will no longer be studied. This beloved community will not only learn about the peace of God, but will make it daily practice in every aspect of their ordinary lives.

Marshall Ganz, community organizer and professor at the Kennedy School of Government, shares the following:

Our stories not only teach us how to act – they inspire us *to* act. Stories communicate our values through the language of the heart, our emotions. And it is what we *feel* – our hopes, our cares, our obligations – not simply what we *know* *but* can inspire us with the courage to act.

He writes further.... A 'story of now" is urgent, it requires dropping other things and paying attention, it is rooted in the values we celebrate in our story and it is contradictions to those values that requires action from us.

*Therefore you must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an unexpected hour.  
Keep Awake for you do not know on what day your lord is coming.*

Matthew was writing we understand to his community who were frustrated that Jesus had not returned to them to assist in overthrowing the Empire. There are of course many in the Christian tradition to this day that also are waiting for his return.

We Anglicans on the other hand, among many others, understand that Jesus is here, present with us, and in us and challenging us to become co-workers in the creation of the Beloved Community, the reign of heaven.

Matthew without equivocation is sharing his impatience, and I suspect God's as well.. now is the acceptable time. Carpe Diem. Get busy, Jesus is coming.

Do you share the value that we are all created in God's image and are called to care for each other as we would for Jesus? Does our response to the level of poverty in our world today meet this standard? If not, what are you going to do about it? GANZ. Get Busy, Jesus is coming....

Am I doing everything I can to protect the immigrant, and release the captive children?

Am I doing everything I can to provide a healthy planet for my great grandchildren?

Am I doing everything I can to provide food, clothing, shelter, health care and education for every human on the planet?

Am I doing everything I can to beat my weapons into plowshares?

Advent is about looking to the mountaintop, to the eternal moment of the perfect creation of that beloved community. We hopefully recognize that we are not the designers, or the architect, or even the master builder. We work to create a future that is not our own, we are simply workers. We plant seeds that we will never see harvested.

We are called to recover an understanding that this is a focus of Advent. It is not a season so much for the preparation for the incarnation, the celebration of Christmas, but a season that sets the context for the liturgical year, that incubates us, allows us new birth and keeps us grounded; preventing us from an experience of a repetitive spin cycle that we can quickly skip to Christmas. As Eckhart wrote we are called to be both birth mother and midwife to God among us. We give birth to the Christ in our time, in our person, and in our work.

*Christians experience is revealed as a living thing, based on historic facts; and dogma is shown to be not a mass of abstract assumptions but torn out of life, but a transcript of realities encountered by the soul.*

FOR, Companions Holy Cross, Episcopal Church Socialist League.

Social Teaching of the Christian Year, Vida Scudder. Delivered at Cambridge 1918.

I fully recognize that the overwhelming power of commerce and empire leaves us little time for reflection, discernment, and to ***learn his ways that we may walk in his path***. Some have already survived the perils of Black Friday. The Church honestly has little defense against all of this; what has become a global culture of Christmas overshadows Advent before it starts. Consider an Advent Conspiracy: Worship Fully, Spend Less, Give More, Love All. Learn more about this 10 year old project at [adventconspiracy.org](http://adventconspiracy.org).

Advent calls us to enter the cycle each year with going deeper and wider into a full participation of God mission, with meaningful horizons, and higher expectations.

We will be encouraged to look toward a future hope that is not a rapture or end time, a reality that Dylan illustrates, but a vision that Isaiah paints for us, with an urgency that Matthew reminds us of.

Perhaps a it is a future hope as we hear in the Messiah, 'the kingdoms of this world have become the kingdom of our God and of his Christ, and he shall reign for ever and ever'.

With this faith we will be able to hew out of the mountain of despair a stone of hope. With this faith we will be able to transform the jangling discords of our nation into a beautiful symphony. MLK