

Homesick
Advent 1C – 11/28/21
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I like sweet little baby Jesus. I feel a little bit like Ricky Bobby of Talladega Nights fame, and kind of want to pray, “Dear Eight Pound, Six Ounce, Newborn Baby Jesus, don’t even know a word yet, just a little infant, so cuddly, but still omnipotent.”¹ At Christmastime, I really like to think about sweet little baby Jesus.

So I wrestle with Jesus from today’s gospel talking about end times. I don’t want to think about how everything will come out at the end of time. I prefer to put my head in the sand and just pretend I will be long gone by then, or maybe that it won’t ever come to that.

I do not like starting each Advent season with a warning.

I want to sing Christmas carols. I want to gather around my mom’s baby grand and sing Christmas songs from memory in 4 part-harmony in front of the blazing hearth with hot cocoa and warm Christmas cookies waiting for us.

I am homesick for Christmas past.

We live in the not-yet as people of faith. Jesus came, but there is that future out there when all will be made right.

We know our lives are not quite as God intends for us. There are wars, hunger, shootings, global climate change, just to name the headlines.

As we have lived through the last nearly two years of pandemic time, many of us are homesick for the way things used to be. We want to gather together and snuggle up with the kiddos and not worry one iota about catching or giving a deadly disease. There is nothing quite like the message that someone has tested positive in the holiday host’s home.

¹ <https://kidadl.com/articles/talladega-nights-quotes-from-the-hilarious-racing-movie>

Or maybe we are homesick because we are all alone these days. Perhaps our family, or extended family is an ocean away. Perhaps family is no longer here at all.

Elder Vitmarie Cintron-Olivieri wrote in the Close to Home Advent devotionals about the feelings of homesickness when her family was still in Puerto Rico during hurricane Maria in 2017. She waited and waited for the glimmer of hope that finally came in two words, days after the storm hit. The words were, “Estamos bien” or “we’re ok.” It’s amazing how two words can bring such hope in chaos; those words were **home**².

Today’s gospel tells us to look for the signs in the stars, moon and sun, to pay attention and be prepared. While we may see signs of a recent lunar eclipse and think maybe just maybe one of those signs Jesus was telling us about, getting ready for the final judgment. Yet, it has been over 2000 years since Jesus uttered this warning. How in the world are we to figure out if this is the end?

I am thinking maybe this is not the right question. Am I ready to meet my maker? Have I done everything I could in this life to make the world a better place? Have I answered God’s calling on my life? How can I be a better person? How can I point to God as the one who helps me through my daily life and offer that to my dear friends as a comfort to them as well? Maybe one of these questions is better. Perhaps.

Jesus points to the fig tree and offers a parable or a story about how to know when summer is near. I cannot remember ever seeing a fig tree, but I do know that when the weeping willow starts to have that pale, pale yellow green glow that spring really is coming. We do know the signs that remind us that we have indeed made it through the winter.

I’m thinking though that Jesus is not really talking about the seasons. I think Jesus is really talking about the kin-dom of God. Of glimpsing little snatches of how the world should really be. I bet you have glimpsed it yourself sometime, maybe even recently. God is trying to break through the noise of this world with the peace that comes when all is made right.

² Elder Vitmarie Cintron-Olivieri in Close to Home Advent devotional by Sanctified Arts 2021.

Our gospel passage speaks to how many of us have a deep longing for our home to be made whole, made right, and made well.

When we look back at our lives, is it not the positives that we remember so wistfully? The joy of singing Christmas carols? The delight in the children's eyes when they see the tree lit up before sunrise? The smile on grandma's face when she spread open her arms for that big hug and she smelled just like Christmas cookies?

I am homesick for those times.

But holidays are not all joy. And the last couple of years in particular have been marked by separation, by loss, and even divisions. We as a nation pause every year to gather around food, but the name of this week's holiday is thanksgiving. And we gathered as many families do to talk about those things for which we are grateful. But holidays can also be a time when we think that all of this is not quite as how God intended. While we may gather in our childhood homes, life has moved on and all is not just as it was, nor just as how God really wants it all to be. We may have full bellies and warm houses, but what about our brothers and sisters across town or across the globe that struggle for food or a warm place to gather?

This is not how God intends us to live. We might hang our heads in shame, in hurt, but today's gospel passage tells us to lift up our heads and watch: redemption is near.

"As Martin Luther King Jr. proclaimed before he was slain, "I have seen the promised land." Like Moses before him and far too many others through the ages, Dr. King did not witness the full realization of that promise. But he caught a glimpse, and in his life, he shared a dream of justice and equality and opportunity for God's children...for ALL God's children. He held fast to hope, refusing to waver, and he urged others to do the same."³

This year, I have been trying to pay attention to remarkable acts of generosity. Of freedom granted, of gifts given.

³ AdventWord devotional for 11/28/21

I have been following the story of Kevin Strickland, who had been wrongfully convicted of a triple homicide nearly 50 years ago. Under Missouri law he was not offered any compensation, despite being 18 at the time of his conviction.

“Missouri is not going to pay Mr. Strickland a dime, but the whole world is going to make sure he’s compensated, *Tricia Rojo Bushnell, Strickland’s attorney and executive director of the Midwest Innocence Project, said in a phone interview Friday with The Washington Post.*⁴

Remarkable generosity...a glimpse of God’s kin-dom come near.

One of our local mission partners says, whenever a remarkable charitable goal has been reached supporting those whom society does not value, this partner says, “Look at God.” He points out **not** what the supporters have done, but what God has done through those moved to support this work. Look at God.

God is continuing to work here and now to make the world right. God works through ordinary people. But we miss what God is doing, if we do not look for the signs that God’s kin-dom has indeed come near.

One thing I think about this whole kin-dom of God coming near...we see it with and through other people. It’s why we gather as a community to reflect on God’s word. It’s why we worship together, why we sing songs of the faith together.

Today’s AdventWord devotional said:

As a prophet and bridge-builder in South Africa both during the wicked time of apartheid and in the years since, Archbishop Desmond Tutu has said, “Your ordinary acts of love and hope point to the extraordinary promise that every human life is of inestimable value.” Through our small and seemingly insignificant acts of kindness and care each day, we commit ourselves once more to the promise. By speaking up and standing up for

⁴ https://www.washingtonpost.com/nation/2021/11/26/kevin-strickland-gofundme-donations/?utm_campaign=wp_post_most&utm_medium=email&utm_source=newsletter&wpisrc=nl_most&carta-url=https%3A%2F%2Fs2.washingtonpost.com%2Fcar-ln-tr%2F3562a9f%2F61a264d89d2fdab56ba3ad29%2F5e7f40089bbc0f0a2ed5cfa7%2F39%2F70%2F61a264d89d2fda56ba3ad29

those who are being silenced and pressed down, we proclaim that we refuse to waver in our hope of the promise.⁵

I was asked recently what I love about this church. I answered that it feels like home. I don't have to put on airs; I can be my true self. I think it's a bit of the sentiment that Paul was writing in his letter to the Thessalonians, one of the readings also prescribed for the 1st Sunday of Advent:

1 Thessalonians 3:9-13.

In it Paul says:

⁹How can we thank God enough for you in return for all the joy that we feel before our God because of you? ¹⁰Night and day we pray most earnestly that we may see you face to face and restore whatever is lacking in your faith.

¹¹Now may our God and Father himself and our Lord Jesus direct our way to you. ¹²And may the Lord make you increase and abound in love for one another and for all, just as we abound in love for you. ¹³And may he so strengthen your hearts in holiness that you may be blameless before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all his saints.

This is the sort of home I crave. That desire to be together and helping each other walk towards God and God's call on our lives.

This Advent season, I pray you join us on the journey, Close To Home.

We are making our way, once again towards Bethlehem, but also closer to God along the way.

Certainly, we will be celebrating the sweet little baby Jesus, but also know all of what grown up Jesus did for us and asks of us and be a little less homesick on the way, because we have each other for the journey.

⁵ AdventWord devotional for 11/28/21