

THE HOPE JOURNAL

LEARNING TO LOVE, TOGETHER

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DIVISION

and the fear of change

by Drew Downs

We often think that propaganda intends to persuade us to believe certain things. However, it is often designed to make us afraid to think. Statues of Stalin in the middle of courtyards are not there to convince people that he was amazing, but to fill people's imagination with this statue—so they couldn't imagine anything else. The threat of division, like violence and discord, has a similar neutralizing effect on us. To avoid pain, we put up with injustice.

Jesus refers to moments of great fear and division as signs of the coming of the Child of Humanity. A moment of true fear is to be a sign of something to rejoice—because that better world that God has dreamed for us is not only possible, but it is coming to fruition right here! This is not a testament to the value of fear, change, division, or any of that stuff. But to the in-breaking grace of God, the legacy of human fear, and our willingness to persevere for the sake of Christ.

ADVENT

2024

WHAT'S GOING ON

*"You know we've got to find a way
To bring some loving here today".*

-Marvin Gaye

Disciples, Apostles, and Saints!

Advent

This Sunday, we begin a new liturgical year again, with Advent, the four Sundays that precede Christmas Day. The themes for Advent involve anticipation, waiting, preparing, which are themes abundant in the culture this time every year as people prepare for Christmas parties, gift-giving, and decorating our homes, offices, and churches for the festivities to come!

We should note that these aren't exactly matches for Advent's themes—as we anticipate the in-breaking grace of God in the incarnate Jesus, whose presence comes as a threat to kings and a boon to the poor; whose own mother sings, not just of her lowliness, but of God's greatness to bring the powerful off of their thrones and to level the field for all people. The anticipation of the season is for the arrival of justice and new hope for the world—not toys and Christmas music.

Yet there is a long history of the church being in conversation with the culture. Some of the church's most famous hymns were drinking songs with new lyrics about the Trinity, grace, or hope in the resurrected Christ. In the same way, our experience of a world transformed, willing to sing Joy to the World in public, neighbors wishing their neighbors health and joy and happiness for the year ahead—we can work with this! And we can see the way these anticipations for love and hope and joy can connect with the incarnation, can't we? That this coming season, with all of its misplaced anxiety and crass consumerism can actually be the perfect place for a birth of new faith, of new justice, of new life.

With love,
Drew

ADVENT

2024

FOR SUNDAY

Advent 1C

December 1, 2024

Collect

Almighty God, give us grace to cast away the works of darkness, and put on the armor of light, now in the time of this mortal life in which your Son Jesus Christ came to visit us in great humility; that in the last day, when he shall come again in his glorious majesty to judge both the living and the dead, we may rise to the life immortal; through him who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever.

Amen.

Reading

Luke 21:25-36

Jesus said, "There will be signs in the sun, the moon, and the stars, and on the earth distress among nations confused by the roaring of the sea and the waves. People will faint from fear and foreboding of what is coming upon the world, for the powers of the heavens will be shaken. Then they will see 'the Son of Man coming in a cloud' with power and great glory. Now when these things begin to take place, stand up and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near."

Then he told them a parable: "Look at the fig tree and all the trees; as soon as they sprout leaves you can see for yourselves and know that summer is already near. So also, when you see these things taking place, you know that the kingdom of God is near. Truly I tell you, this generation will not pass away until all things have taken place. Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away."

ADVENT

"Be on guard so that your hearts are not weighed down with dissipation and drunkenness and the worries of this life, and that day catch you unexpectedly, like a trap. For it will come upon all who live on the face of the whole earth. Be alert at all times, praying that you may have the strength to escape all these things that will take place, and to stand before the Son of Man."

Reflection

It is hard to imagine Jesus's words in this gospel as being all that comforting. All of this confusion, frustration, division...is a sign of the good things to come? It may seem hard to follow why we ought to see these things as *good*. Well, we're not supposed to exactly. These are good things in themselves, but they are signs that good things will be coming.

The late great John Lewis famously spoke of "good trouble." The idea is that, while trouble itself is generally a bad thing, sometimes, getting into trouble can be good—like when we demonstrate against injustice. But more importantly, this kind of good trouble is what happens when injustice is confronted—that people who protect the unjust norms will fight back and cause pain. In this way, there are growing pains, when we can see justice trying to break through.

Jesus directs his followers to see the division to come as the potential in-breaking of God, the potential arrival of justice—and the backlash that comes when the unjust realize their elevated stature is threatened, their privilege and power might not last, that God doesn't actually favor the powerful and wish them to exploit the poor. That, in fact, it is all humankind that are to be in solidarity with one another, in love, service, and faith.

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