

Advent 1 A 2016  
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St. Matthew's Kellers Church  
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Grace, mercy, and peace to you, from our Lord and Savior, Jesus the Christ. Amen

I dream a lot. I like to stay awhile in bed when I wake up, to keep holding on to the dream. To try to remember as much of it as I can. But sometimes I wake so abruptly that the dream is chased away and I can't get it back. Almost like it is stolen.

Jesus warns about a thief. The thief will come in the night. Not when it's the middle of the day and we are looking right out the window. Not when we are ready. Jesus is talking about the second coming of the Son of Man. It will be sudden, and dreadful. Like the flood in which Noah and his family were saved – but others drowned. The coming of the Son of Man will be like a kidnapping. A sudden death. Or a thief. God's coming will not be convenient.

In that way, the second coming will be like the first coming of the Son of Man. Jesus came to a young girl before her actual wedding. That was not convenient. The Son of Man came in a crummy village in a no-place province of a 4<sup>th</sup> rate nation under the power of a great empire. Few people noticed his coming. But the ones who did notice that first coming of the Son of Man – the baby and then the adult Jesus - their lives were changed. They began to live in hope. Like those who lived in the time promised in Isaiah's vision: when the people streamed to the mountain of the Lord, and when they beat their swords into plowing implements, and their spears into pruning hooks. Those of us who have read the Bible already know that elsewhere in Bible, prophets advise the people to beat their plowshares into swords. But in Isaiah's vision it is just the opposite. For the people of Bible times, metal was scarce and valuable. The peasants would not have both tools **and** weapons. The choice was peace or war. They (or the king) had to decide how the precious metal would be used. For food? Or revenge? So when Isaiah spoke of the coming days of the Lord, that they would hammer their weapons into farming tools ~ oh, that was good news! That was hope! That was life, not death.

The purpose of the first coming of Jesus, Son of Man, was to save. The name "Jesus" means "God saves." Saving the people of God, often from themselves, has been God's purpose from the beginning. Back to the earliest days of the Lord's interaction with humans, we can see God's determination to save. God's purpose is even revealed in God's name: Yahweh. In the book of

Exodus, when the Lord reveals the divine name to Moses, most of our English translations indicate that Yahweh means “I will be who I will be,” “I am who I am,” and “I was who I was.” God’s very name encompasses not just the present, but the future and the past. God is everywhen. There is no time without the presence of God. So even in this season of Advent, of waiting for God’s coming, God is present. And will be present. And was present.

In the everywhen, God comes. Especially Jesus comes. Jesus comes at any time. Not only the convenient times. Jesus comes like a thief when we are not ready. In the book of Revelation, Jesus declares that he is the thief. Jesus will take from us whatever we love more than we love him,. Jesus will rob us of whatever we trust and rely on more than we trust and rely on him.

So, on this first Sunday in Advent, I wonder: what do we hold on to, what do we find ourselves clutching, straining after, more than we hold on to Jesus? Money? Our place in the world? Do we strain to hold on to our pride? Or our fears? I like to hold on to my dreams. And not just the ones that happen at night. God will replace them with better dreams. Dreams that will lead to new life. New hope. I don’t need to hold onto a dream ~ God has given me this new day. Full of hope and promises. This new day may be marked with tragedy, too. An accident. A diagnosis. The prospect of having to turn plows into swords. This new day could contain the worst of times, too. As I read my New Testament professor’s commentary on the gospel of Matthew for this sermon, I saw these reassuring words: in the worst of times, we are in the best of hands. [Robert H. Smith] In the worst of times, we are in the best of hands. For our God will be where God will be. Our God will be **when** God will be. And always determined to save us. No matter what. Amen