

1 Advent B 2017
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St. Matthew's Kellers Church
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Grace, mercy and peace to you from our Coming Lord and Savior, Jesus the Christ. Amen

Today is the beginning of Advent. "Advent" means "the coming" in Latin. In the church season of Advent, we look forward to the coming of our God, in human form. As we begin the new church year, this first Sunday in Advent, we have a new gospel to explore. Last year was the year of Matthew's gospel. This year is Mark. In Mark's short gospel there is no infancy narrative. We have to go to Luke or Matthew for that (which we will, on Christmas Eve). Mark's gospel begins with an adult Jesus. A strong and powerful Jesus. Dr. Robin Mattison of the Philadelphia seminary describes Mark's Jesus as "an action figure for God." By Jesus' teachings and healings, he transforms those around him. Hopefully, including us.

Our readings today are surely bold and transformative. Isaiah calls on God as the people in trouble in an action movie would call on the superhero to save them: "O that you would tear open the heavens and come down, so that the mountains would quake at your presence – as when fire kindles brushwood!" And Isaiah's hearers, when they heard him referring to the presence of God kindling a fire, they would think of Moses in the wilderness, approaching God's presence in the burning bush. What a powerful moment that was! That was when God gave Moses the task of leading God's people against the mighty pharaoh. It was when Moses was in the presence of God in the burning bush that God revealed God's name as "Yahweh." God did not reveal God's name to Abraham or Isaac or Jacob or even favored Joseph. But God did reveal God's name to Moses, leader of an enslaved people. The name "Yahweh" is hard to translate. It means, "I am who I am." Or "I will be who I will be." Or "I was who I was." So, the name "Yahweh" carries with it the meaning of having existed forever and forevermore. Isaiah's hearers heard him calling for God to come in power. Power that would make the leader of the mightiest empire tremble with fear. Power that would make anyone jump at the mere movement of a dry leaf across the ground. Come that like, O God! Isaiah begs.

Jesus proclaims that when God does come, it will be sudden. We will not know when it will happen. There will be signs. But we won't be able to understand them, except in hindsight. But God will come. God will come, as surely as the fig tree will leaf out, when summer approaches. So, Jesus says, keep alert for the coming of the Lord. Live each day, each moment, as if God were just about to knock at your door. Keep alert, as if God were just about to ring your cell phone or instant message you.

Because that is what our God does. Our God does indeed come to us. Our God does indeed engage us in conversation. Our God presents us with challenges and is with us as we address

those challenges. So we really should live each moment as if God were about to walk right up to us.

Our God comes to us. Like a visitor you enjoy having around – and would love to have stay. When my sister comes to visit me, I do straighten up the house. (Not as much as when Mom used to come, that's for sure! But still.) And I make sure we have enough soy milk for both of us. And red wine that is not cabernet sauvignon (it gives her headaches). And rice (or orzo) – her favorite. We call, back and forth, to see if there is something special we want to do together and when the fun will start. If we who are 21st century followers of Christ truly believe that God is about to come, wouldn't we get in closer touch with God, to make sure we had everything ready, the way God likes it? We'd look for good news in every conversation. Be more eager to pray, to enter into conversation with God.

Just like we know how our closest and favorite visitor likes it, we know how God likes it. Full of grace and joy. Full of justice and love. God is not lactose-intolerant, but unforgiving-intolerant. God likes it when all are forgiven – not just a few. God gets a headache just imagining the people who don't have a safe, warm place to stay or enough to eat. God likes it when the lonely are visited and the hungry are fed. God likes it when the weak are protected and nurtured to strength. That's like clean sheets to God. Perhaps God's favorite welcome is the prayer, “Help me, Lord, to be full of joy at your coming – and not fear. For I know you love me.”

Our God is coming. That made all the difference. That is making all the difference. That will make all the difference. Amen