

Proper 28, Year B

- I'd like to talk to you this morning about Advent: may not believe me when I tell you this, but at least as far as our Lectionary is concerned, the season of Advent has already begun
- Every year, readings in three weeks prior to Advent take on a distinctively Advent flair
- There's a historical reason for this: when the observation of Advent began, it was actually 7 weeks long – in fact, some E Orthodox traditions still observe seven weeks of Advent
- Some Episcopalians and other mainline Protestants have even picked up on this thread of the tradition and started celebrating 7 weeks of Advent, and I have to say, I'm in favor of it
- Advent is one of our shortest seasons, at 4 weeks, and it comes at what has easily become our busiest time of year - holiday parties, end of year planning, winter vacations, travel... December is an exhausting month - and unfortunately, Advent sometimes gets swallowed up into everything else – either slips by the wayside or, possibly even worse, becomes one more thing we have to do, one more obligation that we feel we have to struggle to meet
- So, because of this vestige of the early Advent tradition that has snuck into our liturgical calendar, this lectionary quasi-season of pre-Advent, we hear some very very Advent-y stories in the three weeks prior to Advent
- And no, I don't mean stories predicting the Christ child, lying in a manger
- That's only one of the comings of the Lord that Advent is meant to anticipate
- Theologians and liturgists will tell you there are no less than three comings that we're anticipating in this season – no wonder we have difficulty really grasping the meaning of the season
- Three different things it's meant to focus us on! –
 - 1. the past coming of Christ at Christmas
 - 2. the present coming of Christ at the Eucharist
 - 3. the future coming of Christ in glory
- Past, present, and future of God
- That's a lot to contemplate, a lot to take in, over the course of the four busiest weeks of the year
- So, fair warning, next year I am strongly considering extending the season of Advent to 7 weeks like a number of other churches already do – so that this extremely important season isn't forced to compete for our attention at the time we have the least of it to spare
- Partly because I'm begging us not to let Advent become another obligation in this busy time of year – it isn't meant to be a burden or an obligation or something else we have to

do, some other way to be worthy

- Advent is about being watchful, knowing that Jesus, the Christ, Emmanuel, God-with-us, may be coming again at any moment, and in fact there is nothing at all we can do to be worthy or deserving or prepared
- In other words, Advent is, if anything, about watching and waiting – about surrender – about anticipating the coming kingdom of God
- In that way, it's a season that really defines what it means to be Christian, really defines our experience of the faith
- Because we live in the shadow of that first coming of Christ at Christmas and, as our Eucharistic Prayer says, 'we await his coming in glory'
- All of our lives are lived in that in-between time, that time of anticipation, of wanting to be watchful and alert and as prepared as we think we can be for the one who has said he will come like a thief in the night
- And so when I say that the Advent-y stories in our lectionary began last week, I also mean we started to hear stories from everyone's favorite genre: apocalyptic
- Loren warned me that it may not actually be everyone's favorite genre, but it's only now, looking at your faces, that I see she might be right
- I suppose that's fair – a lot of the apocalyptic stories we hear are worrisome, even scary
- When our reading from Daniel says, "There shall be a time of anguish, such as has never occurred since nations first came into existence." the average reader is not thrilled about the possibility of that moment coming to pass – and rightly so!
- But Advent isn't meant to be a horror movie screening – the very next sentence of that prophecy in Daniel is "But at that time your people shall be delivered, everyone who is found written in the book."
- Apocalypse doesn't have to be a scary word – it means the same thing as 'revelation' – a sort of final unveiling, recognition of who God is
- The story that God is telling, has always been telling ends on the same note that has been sounding throughout all time: God's mercy, extended to humanity
- Advent is about hope – not blind optimism but the hope of God, grounded in our experience, in a thousand lifetimes of experiences of God
- Advent is about the fact that no matter who we are or where we've been, when our story ends, we know that Jesus is there, waiting for us
- The stories we tell in this season should unsettle us, maybe, but only just a bit

- Because Christ is coming and we know not when – because in Advent we talk about someday this story that God is writing for us is going to be brought to a close
- But reminding ourselves how it ends is just remembering what God has promised
- It reminds me of late pastor and poet Eugene Peterson, author of The Message paraphrase of the bible, and what his son Leif said at his funeral: that his dad only had one sermon - that he had everyone fooled for 29 years of pastoral ministry, that for all his books he only had one message.
- It was a secret Leif said his dad had let him in on early in life. It was a message that Lefi said his dad had whispered in his heart for 50 years, words he had snuck into his room to say over him as he slept as a child:
- The same message these Advent-y readings keep telling us, the message of Advent itself:
- ‘God loves you.
God is on your side.
He is coming after you.
He is relentless.’
-