

Mark 13:24-37
The Great Unveiling
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The theologian Karl Barth said, "The Christian lives in Advent all the time, not merely for a season." What did he mean? Advent is the space-in-time between what is fulfilled in the coming of Jesus Christ and the promise of a new creation, where all the tears are wiped away and God dwells fully with us. This space-in-time is where we live always, and it's not always easy occupying this space that is by its very nature unsettled. We prefer settled.

Yet, nothing about our lives is settled if, in fact, we are paying attention to them. It's permanent liminal space - where the future is beckoning us to new possibilities, new hopes, new dreams and visions of what might arise from the blessings and wreckage of today. I think this may be something of what Barth meant about the Christian always living in the time of Advent. This is how faith in God's promise is formed in us in real time, when the sufferings of our days can overwhelm the joys. Defeats occur - not just on the baseball field or the halls of political power - but in the moment you lose your job, or your hoped for fiancé walks away with your dreams, or the success you expected turns to failure, and you don't quite know how to face the next day with your head up.

It's through these events that the Holy Spirit forms faith in us. Faith that rests not upon on sentimental sayings that warm the heart for a time yet cannot satisfy for long. The Spirit forms sturdy faith that rests upon God's promised future, the promise that gives you fortitude and courage for the living of these days.

My teacher would always say, "The promised future is the basis for the present hope." Now I understand more personally what he meant by a theology of hope that is not determined by present evidence. The wreckage of the present doesn't determine my hope. I can live in light of God's promised future. I also think this is what Dr. King meant when he spoke of the arc of the universe being long yet bending toward justice.

If you forget this middle time we are living, the present can be overwhelming. The present sorrows - look at the world we are experiencing right now fraught with the worst humanity has to offer, descending to the depth of moral depravity. One could be suffocated with the notion that this is the end of the world. Perhaps it is the end of

some world we have counted upon as normal. Yet, what our scriptures declare and our faith proclaims, is that we are nevertheless living in the not-yet-time of Advent.

There is a future that is beyond our grasp and is not entirely in our control. This, I think, is the purpose for these alarming Advent texts in which we are told to be awake and alert. Here in middle time, you pay attention not only to the sorrows that are so obvious in our public life but also to the joys that come your way, and praise them when they do.

At Thanksgiving our family gathered with 30 other people. The center of attention, no surprise, was the youngest one - Iona - practicing her new-formed skill of walking. Down she went with glee and up again to the cheers of everyone watching. It was a moment of joy filling the room and became for me a sign of the promise in our lives that begin in such awkward fits and starts until we walk upright, and then, alas, fall again, only to walk again. So, yes, there is sorrow in this middle time, but there is also great joy - the kind that comes when someone says Yes to God and is lit up from the inside out.

This scripture from Mark is known as the "little apocalypse" inserted into his story of Jesus. Other than to urge you to pay attention and not squander away our your lives, I don't know why it's here. Lately though I've been thinking we are living in the time of the Apocalypse, which has nothing to do with the destruction of the world. My friend David Williams reminds us "The word apocalypse does not mean destruction. Apocalypse, in the Greek from which we received that word, means, "unveiling," a "making clear." Apocalypse, as a genre, is about the stripping away of all the fluff and pretense and getting down to what matters."

If, as Barth suggests, Advent is our permanent time, perhaps we live through more than one apocalypse in our life. Perhaps the Apocalypse is **now** when people are daring to unveil what has been concealed in darkness. When what is covered up is being exposed for all to see. Now the light of Christ may shine upon the works of darkness, and cast them into some lake of fire where they will be healed forever.

Finally, consider this: a wedding is a type of unveiling, and hence, an apocalypse. In Christianity, the end-of-the-world is imagined as wedding when heaven is joined with earth in a joyous feast. This is how the Bible ends. Rather than a prediction of doom and destruction instilling fear in those who are Left Behind, consider the apocalypse as a wedding celebration overflowing with laughter and delight. This is the astonishing joy for which our hearts long in this Advent time when sorrows threaten

hope. For this grace we wait, yearning for the One who comes to fill our lives with joy as at a wedding feast. So stay awake and pay attention, joy will find a way.

In the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.