

Advent Retreat 2017 - Part 1



“Watch” is the key verb in the new Church year beginning December 3, the 1st Sunday of Advent. Advent reminds us we live in between Jesus’ first coming at Bethlehem and his promised return.

A doorkeeper is the focus of the gospel for the 1st Sunday of Advent, Mark 13.33-37, a person charged to welcome the owner home at an unknown time. A doorkeeper keeps watch at a threshold, a place with an outside and an inside, a liminal space where we meet the future and create it with our choices and actions.

A door is where we open our homes and ourselves to guests. We open our doors many times in the Advent season for guests at family gatherings, office parties, caroling events, cookie decorating...Our hearts open and close as doors do, letting people in, keeping them out.

The gospel parable cautions us the owner may return at any time—in the evening, or at midnight, or at cockcrow, or in the morning. Interestingly, in Mark’s gospel, the four times unfold in Jesus’ passion, which begins in the next chapter. Jesus prays in the garden after the last supper, asking that the cup of suffering pass while his closest male disciples sleep. At midnight temple officials arrest Jesus and his men disciples flee. At cockcrow Peter realizes and regrets he has denied even knowing Jesus. At morning the women disciples find Jesus’ tomb empty.

The encounters that await Jesus’ disciples catch them asleep, on the run, in denial, and in awe. Use the parable to watch at the doors of your encounters with others.

Watch at the door of encounter.

- Who opens your door in the evening? What do you do together? What more can you share? Where, when?
- Who is in your life at midnight? Does this person or do these persons excite you? Comfort you? Burden you? Who is in your dreams?

- Who or what wakes you up at cockcrow, let's say 4 am? Write it down when it happens. What does the imagery or situations in the dream tell you about yourself, your direction and purpose in life?
- With whom do you share the dawn of a new day or each new day? With whom do you wish to share a new beginning? How can you make an old relationship new or develop a new friendship out of the box that is your life?

Advent Retreat 2017 – Part 2



Road, highway, path are key words for second week of Advent. Many in Jesus' time heard in the preaching of John the Baptizer the voice of an earlier prophet who preached a return home from exile. The prophet Isaiah saw in the victories of the Persian King Cyrus a way home where for 50 years there had been no way.

In the ancient mythology of the Middle East, leaders attributed military victories to their gods. A victorious god marched at the head of the people to a place where they could build a temple for their god to abide with them. To Isaiah, the experience of exile in Babylon has revealed that Israel's God is transcendent, able to act anywhere, able to make a way where there is no way—through the waters of the sea to escape Egypt and through the wilderness to go home.

A thousand miles of wilderness separates Babylon and Jerusalem. The usual road runs north along the Euphrates River and has to cross over eventually to go south along the sea road to Israel. To go home to Israel means not only traveling but renewing faith and trust in their God.

The path must open up within the hearts of the people, not only through the wilderness.

J. Philip Newell has a wonderful line in the Wednesday morning prayer of the Iona community. It asks God to travel with us as we journey the day. "I on your path, You on my way."

Journey the path within.

- Meditate. Sit comfortably, breathe, center yourself. Set an alarm for the amount of time you want to be quiet. Repeat a mantra from the Advent scriptures, such as:
- "Come, Lord Jesus."
- "One mightier than I is coming."
- "Baptize me with the Holy Spirit."
- Find slivers of quiet in your busy home and work life. Pause to breathe; pray for peace on Earth, good will toward all.
- Sit somewhere in your favorite mall. Clear your mind in the midst of the churning retail world. Breathe deeply and recall with each breath why you bother to celebrate Christmas.
- Make a list of words that express your unique feelings about Advent, whatever words come to mind. Pick the three that express what you most value about Advent.

Stay tuned for parts 3 and 4!