

“But In those days....” So begins our entry into the Season of Advent. It sounds ominous and it is. Advent is not just a liturgical season of the church year. It is a reality of life. It happens in all sorts of ways. It comes at various points in life, not just the four or five weeks before Christmas.

“But In those days after that suffering, the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will be falling from heaven, and the powers in the heavens will be shaken.” These are Jesus words to his disciples. The disciples have been admiring the temple and the large stones. They are impressed. Jesus, however, is telling them that change is coming. The temple of their life is coming down.

If you have ever experienced significant change in your life, whether desired or dreaded, you know about “those days.” You know about Advent. You know what it is like to enter the darkness of change. All change, whether welcome or unwanted, brings some kind of loss. It may be the loss of a relationship, the loss of a loved one, the loss of what is comfortable, familiar or safe. Regardless, the world as we have known it has ended.

What is strange about the present time is that we are all, to some extent or another experiencing this simultaneously along with whatever else is going on in our lives. We have all had change, and we’ve all experienced a sense of loss of our normal way of being and doing.

The Advents of our lives set before us important questions -ones which we need to answer for ourselves, for our brothers and sisters in Christ, and all those around us in our world right now.

How do we find our way forward when the usual lights that illumined our path no longer shine? What do we do when it feels as if our world is falling apart? Where do we go when it seems as if darkness is our only companion and God is no where to be seen?

The dark times of life are threshold moments. The temptation is to do something; to fix it, to ease the pain, to escape the uncertainty, and to get back to what used to be. The God of Advent does not allow that. We can never go back to the way it was before the lights went out. God does not undo our life. God redeems our life.

Advent is not so much about the losses as it is about the hope and coming of what will be. That hope and coming is in the birth of Jesus. The presence of Christ is the ultimate answer to every prayer, to every light extinguishing loss, to every Advent of our life.

Every time we tell the Advent story of our life we echo the prophet Isaiah’s cry, “O that you would tear open the heavens and come down” ([Is. 64:1](#)). And God does. As we heard in our first reading, God is faithful. (1Cor1.)

The Advent times of life are times of waiting. In Advent we live in between what was and what will be. We are neither here nor there. They are times of transition and it is hard, sometimes even impossible, to see the way forward.

If we allow them to, the dark threshold places of life can draw us deeper into the divine mystery. They remind us that we do not know everything. We do not see all possibilities. We can neither predict nor control anything. We are not in charge. Advent challenges us to give up our usual sources of illumination, to let go of our habitual ways of knowing, and to question our typical ways of seeing. Advent invites us to receive the God who comes to us in the darkness of life. Isn't that just where we're at right now?

At some point our world falls apart, life changes, and the lights seem to go out. It can feel like a never ending end, if that makes sense. When these things happen, Jesus says, remember the fig tree. Read the signs correctly. When its branch becomes tender and it puts forth leaves you know summer is near. So also when the darkness overtakes your life know that the Son of Man is near. Christ's presence, our healing, and salvation, are always taking place in the dark and messy parts of life. We have not and never will be abandoned to the darkness.

Some of the most powerful testimonies come out of the biggest griefs.

"Be alert," Jesus warns. He commands us to "Keep awake." Darkness is not our enemy as much as is falling asleep. We fall asleep whenever fear controls or life, when hope gives way to despair.

Too often we allow the darkness to deceive us into believing there is nothing worth waiting or watching for. So we close our eyes. We fall asleep and we become part of the darkness. We refuse to see the One who is always coming to us. The danger in the darkness is that we do not give our eyes time to adjust. We do not trust our night vision. Night vision is not about the light around us but the light that is within us, a light that can never be extinguished.

The Advents of our lives ask us to trust the Coming One more than the darkness. It means we must sit, listen, wait, watch.

In the darkness of Advent we move slower, we listen more than we speak, we hold questions rather than answers. We wait expectantly but without specific expectations. Waiting in darkness is an act of faithfulness and surrender to the Coming One. Waiting becomes our prayer, a prayer that is and will be answered by God's presence.

Tell your Advent story; a story of change, loss, darkness. Then sit down. Be still. Be quiet. Listen. Wait. Watch.

But in those days... in these days... Christ is coming.