

“The World Turned Upside Down”
First Sunday of Advent – November 27, 2016 – Matthew 24:36-44/A

In the Broadway phenomenon, *Hamilton*, there is a moment that follows the decisive battle of Yorktown in 1781. The Revolutionary forces have triumphed (astoundingly,) and Alexander Hamilton hears folks celebrating as they flood the streets singing a drinking song. It is titled, “*The World Turned Upside Down*.” Now that this rag-tag army has defeated the British and won their independence, there is joy, but also a sobering realization of what has happened. While it is the desired outcome, the people are somewhat in shock and disbelief at what they have done.

Shock. That is what many are feeling these days. Open the papers, hear the daily news and it shocks us: another shooting, another violent attack, another protest. Another victim of cancer, Alzheimer’s, ALS, PTSD. Another unexpected turn for which you are not prepared. And the world turns upside down.

Jesus is talking about just that kind of *suddenness* today. (And, need I say this again: this is not a Biblical description of the “Rapture” which is a mid-19th century construction of fear. See the Wikipedia article on “premillennialism.”) What Jesus is talking about is how quickly life can change. He cites the people, going about their daily routines: schedules, meals, kids and work, when a flood destroyed all of it, and only a handful were saved.

He talks about colleagues sitting in adjoining cubicles; teachers team-teaching the same class; neighbors living in the same cul-de-sac; folks existing side by side one day – and on the next day – **not**. Jesus tells them that of course they would be better prepared if they were better prepared! But since they (and we) are not, then we should keep awake forever – never sleep again - or simply find a better way...

As early as the word of the prophet Isaiah (today we light the 1st Advent candle, The Prophecy Candle,) God was making clear the promise of our future. God was establishing a universal reign of peace, and God’s people are rejoicing with a new determination: “*Let us walk in the light of the Lord, NOW!*” A timely message as the world begins annual festivals of light: Our Jewish brothers and sisters celebrate Hanukkah; the Hindu of India use colored lights for Diwali; and Christians have Christmas.

As the natural darkness descends and we settle into the night earlier, we also mark our national days of thanksgiving – and post pictures and comments on social media to remind ourselves of just how good we have it; how “blessed” we are (as it were); how we are rooted in family and tradition, and caring for each other. How the only things that truly matter are people; that God loves us no matter what; and that we are saved by grace.

Today we begin the Season of Advent – a whole new church year. Today we start with a clean slate, and regardless of your pick in our recent election, Life has a way of dealing each of us shifts and changes in the solid foundation under our feet. And that makes each of us feel like our world has turned upside down...*So we lift our eyes to the hills, from where our strength comes. We are glad when they say, Let us go to the house of the Lord!* (Psalms 121; 122.)

You know, God knows about that feeling of unexpected things happening – his gift was turned into a sacrifice. And what does God do in the midst of Chaos? God creates new life. We’ve known that since “*In the beginning...*” So why do we keep forgetting that it is our job as well? I invite you to consider these two reminders from author Michael Gerson:

First, Christianity teaches that everyone broken, sick, and lonely —
everyone beneath our notice or beneath our contempt — is, somehow,

Christ among us...We show civility and respect, not because the men and women who share our path always deserve it or return it, but because they bear a divine image that can never be completely erased."

As Dorothy Day said, "*(Christ) is disguised under every type of humanity that treads the earth.*"

Second, Christians are instructed not to be anxious — "*take no thought for tomorrow*" — because they can trust in a benevolent purpose behind events...

Advent is a season, wrote Dietrich Bonhoeffer from his prison cell, "*in which one waits, hopes, does various unessential things, and is completely dependent on the fact that the door of freedom has to be opened from the outside.*"

In our second lesson this morning, the Apostle Paul writes to the Romans: *Besides this, you know what time it is, how it is now the moment for you to wake from sleep. For...the night is far gone, the day is near.* As our Call to Worship this morning we heard and sang the "Canticle of the Turning," from our hymnal. Lindsey Perry sang as Mary, rejoicing through words reminiscent of the Magnificat: "*wipe away our tears for the dawn draws near, and the world is about to turn...*" I say, bring it. Amen.

Resources: Michael Gerson, *Washington Post* Writers Group, in the *KC Star* 11/25/16; "Yorktown" from *Hamilton*, Lin-Manuel Miranda