

“Watching, Waiting, Walking”

Isaiah 2:1-5; Matthew 24:36-44 – Rev. Rebecca Littlejohn

Vista La Mesa Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), La Mesa, California – November 30, 2025

First Sunday of Advent – Hope

Holy God, bless the speaking and the hearing of these words, that the eyes of our hearts might see clearly by your light. In the name of the One Coming Into the World we pray, Amen.

It is not a coincidence that this liturgical season – when we focus on the light shining in the dark without being overcome – got scheduled during the season when daylight is the scarcest in the hemisphere where the church year was developed. There was, of course, the overlapping and appropriation of holidays that were already focused on making sure the light comes back. But we have continued to lean into it, long after we believed that all-night bonfires could somehow make spring come.

I was on a Zoom with my dad last week. He lives in southern Michigan, and at some point during the visit as we were comparing weather, I noticed that the sun is going down half an hour later for them than it is for us, at 5:15 instead of 4:45. I was a little jealous for a moment. Mind you, they also now have ten inches of snow and windchill making the air feel 17 degrees colder than it actually is. Then a few days later, I realized that sunrise here is currently about an hour and half earlier than it is at their house. In southern Michigan right now, the sun doesn't come up till almost 8 o'clock! Now, some of that is because they're at the far western end of their timezone. But it's mostly because they're so much farther north than we are.

Why do we find this stuff so fascinating? Somehow, light is simultaneously something we take for granted and something that we know is crucial to our existence, or at least our happiness. Gloom is depressing, but darkness is downright scary sometimes—because we can't see in the dark! At some level, it's as simple as that. We like to be able to look around and see what's happening.

Now, there are other things that obscure visibility; think of that aforementioned ten inches of snow, which at one point my dad said was coming in sideways. But we have our own issues with visibility here in balmy San Diego. It was hours before I could see Mt. Miguel from my window this morning. At first, it was just completely covered up with fog. That was pretty normal. But then, for a short while, it wasn't just covered up, but honestly, hard to look at, because the fog was glowing so bright it hurt my eyes. You don't think about bright fog being a thing, but it is and it makes it just as hard to see as thick, dark fog does.

There is an old Hasidic Jewish story in which a rabbi asks his students when they know the dawn has come. They suggest certain tests, like when you can tell the difference between a sheep and a dog from a distance, or when you can tell if a plant is a young fig tree or a grapevine. But then the rabbi enlightens them: it is only dawn when you can look into the face of any human being and recognize them as your kin; if you can't see that, it is still night. That is the sort of light we are actually seeking in this season of Advent – the light that makes things clear with the lens of love.

Our theme for Advent this year is “Preparing for the Light of Christ.” As I read through the scriptures that kick off this new year of the lectionary, I was struck by how much they seemed to speak of God helping us see things clearly. We live in times when we can no longer trust what we see with our eyes, as AI-generated images and “deep fakes” have become commonplace. Advent invites us to clear our eyes and sharpen our senses. If we are to be ready to welcome the Light of Christ, we will need to accustom ourselves to seeing things for what they really are, including ourselves.

Advent is often framed as a season of waiting and watching, and our scripture from Matthew leans into that idea. “Keep awake!” Jesus says. That passage is actually more focused on what we don’t know, rather than what we can learn if we keep our eyes open. But I would argue the point is that Jesus is trying to be clear about what is not ours to know, not simply keeping us in the dark.

It’s the passage from Isaiah 2 that I find more instructive for us today. “Waiting and watching” can feel very passive, like it’s all up to God, so there’s nothing for us to do one way or another. But Isaiah adds another W-word: walking. The people who are craving the guidance of God are encouraging one another to walk toward that wisdom and then to walk in the clarity that comes from that wisdom: “Come, let us go up the mountain of the Lord... that we may walk in his ways.” We can’t just sit here and expect things to become clear. In a time when forces are actively working to confuse and obfuscate what’s really happening, we must respond by searching for wisdom just

as intentionally. If we want to be enlightened, we need to leave our comfortable, dimly-lit rooms and dare to go out where the truth is unavoidable. We need to make the effort to listen to the voices of those being impacted by the violence and oppression of our world. We need to open our eyes to see how we have acquiesced to the way things are, because we didn't fully believe in God's promise of how things could be.

Jesus doesn't say to do nothing; he just says the end isn't up to us. In the meantime, there's a lot of walking in the ways of God to be done. There are a lot of human beings out there in need of being recognized as our kin. There are a lot of weapons hurting our children, and not nearly enough tools for feeding them.

There are loud and persuasive voices trying to convince us that we are in danger, that everyone else is our enemy, and that we must therefore, prepare our defenses. They want us to believe that we would be hopeless without them. But that is not the Word of the Lord; that is not the way of God; that is not the light of Christ. It is the light of Christ that helps us see our neighbors, near and far, as our kin, whether they look like us or not. It is the way of God to trust that the ends are in better hands than ours. It is the Word of the Lord to proclaim that we need study war no more. This is where our Hope lives, in seeing clearly both how our world is and how God desires for it to be. In walking the path that will bring those two things closer together. And once our eyes are open, seeing clearly in the light of Christ, we will discover that the

kingdom of heaven is breaking out all around us, that Hope is not just a seed, but already in bloom, in so many little ways.

Nobody is asking us to be able to see in the dark. Nobody is even asking us not to be afraid of the dark. But the season is inviting us to stop wallowing in the dark, feeling sorry for ourselves, and get up to go find some matches. Yes, it is a season of waiting and watching. We don't always have to make the first move. We need to be clear about what's happening. But we need to keep moving; we need to keep following. We need to walk toward the light, so that we will be ready to welcome the dawn when it comes. Hallelujah and Amen!