

Gloria Dei Meditation  
Rev. Alan Lindal  
November 27, 2011  
Isaiah 64:1-9  
Psalm 80:1-7, 16-18  
I Cor. 1:3-9  
Mark 13:24-37

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

Last year on the First Sunday of Advent, the Sunday after Thanksgiving, while Pastor Jacobson and his family were with their family over the holiday, I was the pastor of the day here at Gloria Dei. The texts were from the lectionary, all about waiting and watching and hoping and fearing and I shared about the Second Coming of Christ as foretold by Edgar Whisnant in 1988. Jesus was coming to Gravette, Arkansas, and 2000 of his followers were gathered on the rooftops in the Arkansas hills.

This year we are here again. Again I am the pastor of the day. Pastor Jacobson and his family are with their family over the holiday. The texts of the day are from the lectionary. They are all about waiting and watching and hoping and fearing and not to be without an illustration of futile watching and waiting and hoping and fearing, along comes the Rev. Harold Camping of the Family Life Radio Church out of California. He announced that the end of the world would be on May 21 of this year. Didn't happen. Then he changed it to October 21, only 36 days ago. Still here. If you're desperate to listen to a rather pitiful interview of the Rev. Camping, you can google on Youtube. It isn't pretty.

So what is the purpose of this eschatological passage from the gospel of Mark and found in some other gospels? Surely it isn't there just to have a series of theological buffoons point to a date and say "This is it." The whole idea of the "escahton" or the fullness of time supports the vision of God as working within time and place and people. There will be a time when all will be fulfilled. The visions of the prophets of lion and lamb peacefully dwelling together will be realized. Swords shall be beaten into plowshares and peace will be known by all.

We live with a certain tension of wanting God's presence in our lives, but not really. For that would require change. We know that we are a people who are quite capable of turning our backs not only upon each, but also upon God. We yearn to have God near, but we also would want God far away. These passages of scripture that tell of a need to have God present and God coming to meet that need are somehow strangely comforting to us who live with this tension of desiring God and yet wanting to remain how we are.

Today we are invited to hear the prophet in the tradition of Isaiah explain fairly clearly our situation. We are so far removed from God at times that it seems that God is hiding from us, has turned God's face from us. And the prophet speaks for us when we cannot and says, "You, Lord, are our Father. You are the potter, we are the clay. We are all the work of your hand." We are clear about that. We did not make ourselves. Ever since the day of our conception, God has formed us and shaped us. The waters of baptism have claimed us as His redeemed. "Look upon us Lord, for we are yours."

Then we hear the apostle Paul, thanking God for the Corinthians who have been blessed by God with all spiritual gifts as they await for the Lord Jesus to be revealed. Waiting, watching, but gifted for the waiting, gifted for the watching. The question for us this morning is "What are we doing with our giftedness?"

Are we trying to outgod God? Are we trying to make sense of all of the rapid changes which are about us in our families, our politics, our government, our world, our shrinking retirement portfolios? Where is God in all of this? That is an appropriate question as we begin yet another church year.

God is here. God is among God's people. We have been gifted by the outpouring of God's spirit upon us. I have had two knee surgeries this fall. One the day after Labor Day and the other six weeks later. Part of my recovery from those surgeries was physical therapy which reignited muscle groups above and below the knees. There were specific exercises that were needed. I had to be patient. I couldn't overdo and hurry up the process, but if I was compliant and faithful, the muscles would eventually restore

my proper gait as I walked.

We have been gifted by God with everything we need to be what the world needs us to be. A hurting, lonely, dispassionate world should be able to see the face of God in how we live and move and have our being here on earth. The Spirit of God has not ceased to shed abroad the love of God within us and among us. That love has the ability to overflow from us to others and meet others at the point of their need. God's provision is always, is always greater than our vision. It is a matter of trust. The purpose of the church should always be to stir up the gifts which are ours. Maybe they need to be reignited like my muscles after surgery. The whole matter of attentive worship and our work in the liturgy of worship helps us to fire up the gifts which are within us.

The question for us this morning again is "What are we doing with our giftedness?"

I wish to close this morning with a paraphrase of the thirteenth chapter of I Corinthians from Eugene Peterson's **The Message**.

1 If I speak with human eloquence and angelic ecstasy but don't love, I'm nothing but the creaking of a rusty gate. 2 If I speak God's Word with power, revealing all his mysteries and making everything plain as day, and if I have faith that says to a mountain, "Jump," and it jumps, but I don't love, I'm nothing. 3-7 If I give everything I own to the poor and even go to the stake to be burned as a martyr, but I don't love, I've gotten nowhere. So, no matter what I say, what I believe, and what I do, I'm bankrupt without love.

Love never gives up.  
Love cares more for others than for self.  
Love doesn't want what it doesn't have.  
Love doesn't strut,  
Doesn't have a swelled head,  
Doesn't force itself on others,  
Isn't always "me first,"  
Doesn't fly off the handle,  
Doesn't keep score of the sins of others,  
Doesn't revel when others grovel,  
Takes pleasure in the flowering of truth,  
Puts up with anything,  
Trusts God always,  
Always looks for the best,  
Never looks back,  
But keeps going to the end.

8-10 Love never dies. Inspired speech will be over some day; praying in tongues will end; understanding will reach its limit. We know only a portion of the truth, and what we say about God is always incomplete. But when the Complete arrives, our incompletes will be canceled.

11 When I was an infant at my mother's breast, I gurgled and cooed like any infant. When I grew up, I left those infant ways for good.

12 We don't yet see things clearly. We're squinting in a fog, peering through a mist. But it won't be long before the weather clears and the sun shines bright! We'll see it all then, see it all as clearly as God sees us, knowing him directly just as he knows us!

13 But for right now, until that completeness, we have three things to do to lead us toward that consummation: Trust steadily in God, hope unswervingly, love extravagantly. And the best of the three is love.

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