

*And there will be signs in sun and ... moon and in the stars, and upon the earth distress of nations in perplexity at the roaring of the sea and the waves, men's hearts failing with fear and ... foreboding ...; for the powers of the heavens will be shaken.*

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Do you ever worry whether or not we're living through the Book of Revelation in real time? Not some high-budget Hollywood make-believe apocalyptic terror but real-life terror; real life devastation and destruction; in real time. I mean, it's one thing to sit down and watch a show about the kinds of weapons that are wielded by the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse, for example – but it's an entirely different thing when it seems that we're watching them almost every day. I mean, if you're in Yemen or Afghanistan right now, coping with all the disorder and destruction of war and violence and terror, wouldn't it seem like you were witnessing the weapons of the first two horsemen; the weapons of violence and conquest and war. And if you're struggling right now to feed your kids, with all the supply chain problems driving up the costs of basic food necessities, wouldn't it seem that you're facing in real time the scales of the third horseman at work; the scales of food scarcity and hunger? And when we look at the climate change devastation in British Columbia and Newfoundland – with record heat and catastrophic rain; not to mention a pandemic which has ravaged every corner of the world for nearly two years now, with new variants threatening to upset whatever progress we thought we were making – doesn't all of this look all too much like the weapons of pestilence and plague and death wielded by the fourth horseman of the apocalypse? Reading about such things is scary enough; living through them is downright terrifying!

Sometimes it can feel like the world is collapsing. That can be the case in our own lives when pain or grief assault us; when fear and uncertainty keep us awake in the dark of the night; when doubt crushes hope; when the bank says that time's up and we're on the verge of losing our home; when the small shadow appears on an X ray after years of remission; when the doctor calls us to give us the results of that blood test that we had a few weeks back; when we wait in anguish for the sound of the car pulling into the driveway, praying that our son or daughter might get home early. I suspect that, if we were to be honest with ourselves, we would have to admit that, in one form or another, those four horsemen can seem all too real in our own personal moments of terror.

And what's true for us personally is true for our all too broken; all too bitter world; when we see the depressing unrelenting brutality of humanity's inhumanity; whether it's oppression in Myanmar or Yemen or Afghanistan; or poverty and unsanitary conditions on an indigenous reserve in the remote north; or political and cultural inequality and division

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The language of Advent that we hear so starkly in this week's gospel is the language of distress; the language of suffering and sorrow; of anguish and disorder. The images of Advent are images of darkness; of failure and fear; of chaos and confusion; images which seem all too real, as we are reminded every day. The language of Advent speaks directly to the reality of human life as it unfolds day by day in all its confusion and, sometimes, even horror. The language of Advent speaks of the destruction of war and

violence of crushing poverty and despair; of natural and supernatural disorder; of lives broken by abuse and neglect, by carelessness and apathy. But in the face of all of these things, Advent also tells us that devastation and destruction and confusion and chaos are not the final word for any of us because Christ is coming. Advent reminds us in our distress that the Christ who once came as a newborn infant has promised to come again as Saviour and King.

Advent tells us that we are not forgotten; that when we feel abandoned; when we feel that the darkness will overwhelm us; when we begin to think that it's more than we can handle, that we're too tired to go on; Advent tells us that God has not forgotten us:

*Now when these things begin to take place, look up and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near.*

And because of that promise, more than another other weapon at our disposal, Advent has the power to make sense of the darkness that seems to envelop human life; whether it's the darkness of racial and ethnic bigotry; or the darkness of violent brutality; whether it's the darkness of hunger or addiction or fear; or the darkness of physical and emotional abuse, which, all too sadly, has been made that much worse by the isolation of the pandemic.

The uniqueness of Advent is that it forces us more than any other season to look deeply into *what is wrong* in the world, and why our best-laid plans don't work out the way we meant them to, and why our greatest hopes are so often confounded, and why things happen the way they do, and why sometimes it is so difficult to see where God is acting. Every year Advent begins in the dark.<sup>1</sup>

And Advent tells us that even the darkest moments that we encounter are no match for the power of God because Christ has come to be a light in whatever darkness we face.

So for us Advent is a gift; a precious gift of time to straighten out whatever's not yet right in our hearts and in our souls; a time to overcome that one struggle; to heal what's been broken; to forgive and be forgiven; to be kinder, more gracious, more patient, more caring. It's a time to interrupt whatever priorities the world may impose upon us that we might instead look into our own lives to know that Christ is always with us: the Christ who comes to us in the broken places where we know we just can't make it on our own. And, as we are reminded by this week's Epistle from Saint Paul, Advent challenges us to put our hope not in whatever bright shiny bauble has drawn our attention for a moment but in the Word; The Word of God Written, the Word of promise; and in the Word of God made flesh; the Christ.

So to each of you on the this the Second Sunday of Advent we bring the good news that Christ will come again, as the Word has promised in his Word; that his justice will prevail over every human injustice; that in the fullness of time he will destroy evil and pain in all its many forms, once and forever. Advent tells us of God's Promise to come to our rescue - first in the birth of His Son Jesus and second in His return to right all wrongs and to heal all pain. And to be a follower of Jesus Christ, this Christ who comes to be the light of our ever-darkened world, is to live each day in the light of that hope; to live each day shoulder to shoulder, heart to heart, mind to mind, with those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death; and to bear their sorrows and their fears with them; to brighten their darkness with the very same light that Christ shines into ours.

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<sup>1</sup> Fleming Rutledge