

Through the written word, and the spoken word, may we know your Living Word
Source of all being, Eternal Word and Holy Spirit, Amen

Text: Matthew 24:33-44

Series: Open to the Light

Sermon Title: Be surprised: Christ is breaking in.

Rev. Sharon Smith

There are some life moments that slow things down...:

- That moment when you fumble with a glass plate in the kitchen and slowly watch it crash to the floor – and there is nothing you can do, it just drops and shatters. Even though like in slow motion you watched it fall.
- That moment when you hear difficult news, and your body, mind and spirit takes time to soak it all in. It's like time adjusts for us in this instance and gives extra space.

and there are some moments that need to be slowed down:

- When a tennis ball hits the ground near or on the line at a crucial point in the match. And we are not sure if it is in or out.
- Or a day of the year that reminds us, that God has not abandoned us. That light has come and keeps coming. That hope is near. That infinity is present to us in all living goodness.

And so we begin today that slow motion season of Adventus – Latin for presence or arrival. It's as if we have slowed Christmas down for 4 weeks because it is that crucial to us.

The birth of Jesus. The coming of Christ.

The breaking in of light again and again, in and among us.

Matthew tells us that we will be completely surprised, taken back.
For Christ comes near in the most unexpected ways, times and places.

And Matthew uses apocalyptic language of darkness:

When you see all these things refers to

- Wars and rumors of war
- The sun will be darkened
- The moon will not give its light
- The stars will fall from heaven

This is the language of a people in a dangerous time – it is code for speaking about the political situation - to speak the truth about power. While not speaking directly to the ones in power.

A bit like cockney in the early 19th century in the East End of London; hence its alternative name, Cockney rhyming slang. In the United States, especially the criminal underworld of the West Coast between 1880 and 1920, rhyming slang has sometimes been known as Australian slang

It really – kept some people in the dark about what they were saying:

- Baked Bean = queen
- Dog = dog and bone = phone
- Duck and Dive = skive
- Ones and twos = shoes

Matthews words about the present despair now bring hope by injecting the future. Christ's coming for Matthew's audience hearing the words of Jesus was about the end of a Political oppression.

Where, their fear and overwhelm could lead to paralysis – he calls them to be attentive to what was present before them in the moment to be and do.

So we have

- A reference to the times of Noah.
- A reference to two people in a field or at a mill.
- And a thief coming at night.

And all of this not literal but a metaphor for the unexpectedness of Christ, of a moment of the awareness of God among us, the Spirit with us. To give us courage and to lead us to action.

When God comes near, we are usually not ready.

And when Christ comes near, we are called to put things right – neighbour with neighbour.

In line with Mary's song - Dispensing justice far and near, dismissing selfish hearts. casting the mighty from their thrones, promoting the insecure, leaving hungry spirits satisfied.

- When Christ comes near.

What of when our waiting seems futile?

What about when everything around us or on the news is despairing and chaotic and illogical?

Does religion still offer us hope in these days?

Those who have experienced religious corruption, evils may lose faith in what it brings.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote *Letters and Papers from Prison*, a collection of writings composed between April 1943 and February 1945, while he was imprisoned in Germany.

In this place, at the hands of those who used Christianity for destruction of others, Bonhoeffer wrote:

“You would be surprised, and perhaps even worried, by my theological thoughts and the conclusions that they lead to... What is bothering me incessantly is the question what Christianity really is, or indeed who Christ really is, for us today. The time when people could be told everything by means of words, whether theological or pious, is over, and so is the time of inwardness and conscience – and that means the time of religion in general. We are moving towards a completely religionless time; people as they are now simply cannot be religious anymore. Even those who honestly describe themselves as ‘religious’ do not in the least act up to it, and so they presumably mean something quite different by ‘religious.’”

Post-modern scholar John Caputo picks up on this theme and he says Religion is “Rotting from the inside, it is the ugliness of spirit of many religious people that is becoming a more effective argument against religion than anything the new atheists can come up with from without”

John Caputo: Hope against Hope

And then Caputo adds:

Is it possible to imagine a religion that appeared incognito, under a pseudonym, taking both the believers and the unbelievers by surprise when it finally removes its disguise?

Imagine if we came to worship not knowing what to expect, to be surprised, woken up?

Perhaps that is the good news of Advent:

that we are reminded that Christ has been staking this joint like a thief and is going to break in!

There was and is and will be a break in because God is not interested in our loss-prevention programs but in saving us from ourselves and saving us from our culture and saving us even from our certainties about God’s story itself.

God seems to work not through the things we are prepared for, but through the things we don’t expect.

When something goes well, and we are like wholly jack how did that happen!

God is the suspect!

Nadia Boltz Weber, Accidental Saints.

WE NEED THE LIGHT, FRIENDS. **WE** NEED TO OPEN TO THE LIGHT!

It's a lovely image that two are walking in the field, two are grinding grain at the mill.

They are not two similar people. Something makes them different. One would have been swept away in Noah's flood (taken) and the other would have been in the Ark perhaps (left behind in safety)?

Whatever their differences – they are invited in this text not to be afraid of a rapture, but they are invited to keep each other awake.

Perhaps something of the Celtic tradition of soul-friend; the old Gaelic term for this is Anam Cara. An Anam Cara refers to someone who helps to reveal the hidden intimacies in your life - a guru, a mentor, a close spiritual friend, a teacher, a companion.

The Celts believed that we all needed an Anam Cara in our lives.

A person who lights a candle for us to see our hidden places.

I think that's what the two psychologists Joseph Luft and Harry Ingham were on about in the 1950's. When they created Johari's window.

This is a window into the process of human interaction and self-awareness. It is often used for corporate groups to help individuals know themselves in the context of others with whom they work. To learn to be Christ's light to each other.

The four windows represent the revelation of parts of us that are either:

- 1) openly known to ourselves and others – the arena or
- 2) known just to ourselves – the façade (we hide it from others) or
- 3) known to others and not to us (our blind spots) or
- 4) that which is hidden to us and others (the mystery perhaps of our unconscious)

In this slow-motion season of Advent -

Open to the light of Christ in community,
Come human family, let's walk in the light of God.
Endless light dazzles the darkness in my heart.