

Have you seen some of the billboards out there with God as the supposed author of them? Some good ones include: “My way is the highway,” “What part of ‘Thou Shalt Not’ didn’t you understand?” and my personal favorite, “That ‘Love thy Neighbor’ thing? – I meant it.” Others point to questionable theology – the one that comes to mind for today, our first Sunday in Advent, is “Don’t Make Me Come Down There!” I love it for its humorous edge but the theology of God as a threat is twisted. During the seasons of Advent and Christmas, this is the very thing we celebrate – that God came down here! On Christmas Day we are reminded that Jesus came to us in human flesh, not as a punishment, but as an expression of God’s love, to save us from our proclivity toward isolation from God and one another and to redeem us, to bring us into intimacy with God and one another, to bring us into the fullness of life.

So during this season of Advent we focus on getting ready for Jesus, intentionally and actively waiting for Christ’s coming into our lives. Many of you have probably already encountered a well intentioned grocery clerk or friend who asks you, “Are you ready for Christmas yet?” I often wonder when I get this question, “What does this person mean here?” Maybe she means, “Have you bought all your Christmas presents?” or “Is your house decorated yet?” Not that there is anything inherently wrong with getting ready for Christmas in tangible ways, but I wonder today on this first day of Advent if we can look at the deeper meaning of the question, “Are you ready for Christmas?”

How can we get ready for Jesus? Let’s go back a couple of thousand years to Mark, the writer of today’s Gospel. In today’s reading Mark paints a very strange picture of the second coming of Christ. In this passage, sometimes referred to as the “little apocalypse,” as opposed to the “big apocalypse” in Revelation, the sun will be darkened, the moon will not give its light and the stars will fall from the heaven. Taken in its proper context this image is not to be read literally but metaphorically. Marcus Borg, well-known biblical scholar, says that “metaphorical meaning of language is its *more than literal, more than factual* meaning.”<sup>1</sup> Here the meaning behind these cosmic images recalls the famous R.E.M. song from the 1980’s *It’s the end of the world as we know it*.

Do you sometimes feel as though the sun and moon have gone dark as you watch the news or just experience life, as climate change affects our weather in destructive ways, as violence, in its infinite forms, continues to take away too many lives, as some of our leaders continue to bully, to demean, to sexually harass? Do you feel as though the stars have fallen from heaven when you have been in an explosive argument with a colleague, a friend or family members? To get ready for Jesus might mean to demand accountability of from people when they misbehave; to get ready for Jesus might mean to swallow one’s pride and with God’s help apologize to the person we yelled at, asking for forgiveness. To get ready for Jesus might be to listen to those who have been wronged or who are in pain. To be ready for Jesus is to allow the Christmas story to

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<sup>1</sup> The Gospel of Mark, by Marcus J. Borg, p.8

intersect with our own story, our own lives. To look within and be willing to see where we need Jesus' loving presence, to see where the gaps, the conflicts, the sins are (we all have those places!), to see how we can be open to God's healing and wholeness. Are you ready to welcome Jesus into your heart, ready to be transformed by love?  
Are you ready?

(Then the children will come in, saying "Are you ready? Are you ready?" and move into their Advent program)