

According to Mark . . . December 2017

. . . Pastor, Interrupted

Most of you know by now that I was involved in a motor vehicle accident that has sidelined me for a few months. But just because I'm not there in the pulpit, doesn't mean that I have stopped wondering what we can all learn as we come into the Advent and Christmas season and begin the new Church Year (and for those of you following the lectionary at home, it's Year B, focusing on the Gospel of Mark as well as having more selections from the Gospel of John than any other year).

Many of us have been through unexpected events in our lives. When we're laid off, it used to be that we received 2-4 weeks' notice and some time to look for another position. In one layoff of my corporate career, they gave me 3 hours notice on a Friday, took my computer and escorted me and the others out of the building as if we were criminals. Health events don't wait for a convenient time or place, they simply present themselves at a time of THEIR choosing and we are left to figure out how to rearrange our lives to accommodate them. And people dear to us are stricken with tragedies in their lives or their children's lives that leave us reeling. Sometimes it just doesn't feel like "the most wonderful time of the year" amongst our friends, neighbors, church-goers, and acquaintances dealing with family breakups and divorce, loss of a job, drug or alcohol addiction, and sickness or loss of a loved one. So we are left to wonder how we go on; where do we go from here? And where is God in all this?

Let's return to our season. Advent. It is expectation about Jesus' coming into the world, in the most unlikely of places (a cattle barn stall, or manger) under the most unlikely of circumstances (born to a young woman who was already pregnant when she married Joseph and had all kinds of trouble with friends, family, and neighbors alike) and to the most unlikely of people (a poor, probably illiterate carpenter and a person of not just modest, but probably little means other than providing for his new family week to week). And so what that says to us is that because Jesus broke through the barriers of class, income, race, social status, and education, God is MOST likely to appear in the UNLIKELY circumstances, the messiness, the tumbling and rushing waters of our baptism, the place in our lives where we feel most abandoned.

I have found God in a variety of settings these past few weeks. Such as the hospital chaplain who took the time to come down to the ER and call friends and relatives to let them know I would be OK. Or when I was in intractable pain and at MGH one night and a nurse took time to sing "Soft Kitty" (a lullaby the characters on "Big Bang Theory" all gain comfort from when they are ailing) to me and made me not just smile, but bust out laughing. Or the nurse's aid who stopped what she was doing to help feed me the soup and cut up the meal that had come that first night at the hospital because my lips were shredded beyond recognition and I could not easily swallow liquids, nor use a straw because of my blood-filled sinuses and broken nose. Or the kids who came out to help decorate our house for the holidays because we could not. Or the time that friends stopped by just because, with a dinner of meatballs and manicotti when Kate and I were just at our exhausted end, even though it was only early afternoon.

I love that I am loved. It is seen in the cards, emails, and phone calls that would be visits and hugs if it weren't for the distance between me and thee. But I also know that there will be many more moments where Christ comes from unexpected people, places, and circumstances, and Advent for me is less about the waiting and more about the NOTICING where Jesus already is doing amazing work in the hearts of those who have ears that can hear, and eyes that can see. So awaken, dear people, to the wonder of what is already manifest and present. And then celebrate those gifts richly and abundantly.

Pastor Mark