



# SERMONS AT SAINT MARK'S

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THE FIRST SUNDAY OF ADVENT, DECEMBER 1, 2023  
ISAIAH 64:1-9; PSALM 80:1-7,16-18; 1 CORINTHIANS 1:3-9; MARK 13:24-37

## BETWEEN “FIX IT, JESUS” AND “STAY WOKE”

*Mark 13:24-37 [Jesus said, “In those days, after that suffering, the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will be falling from heaven, and the powers in the heavens will be shaken. Then they will see ‘the Son of Man coming in clouds’ with great power and glory. Then he will send out the angels, and gather his elect from the four winds, from the ends of the earth to the ends of heaven. “From the fig tree learn its lesson: as soon as its branch becomes tender and puts forth its leaves, you know that summer is near. So also, when you see these things taking place, you know that he is near, at the very gates. Truly I tell you, this generation will not pass away until all these things have taken place. Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away. “But about that day or hour no one knows, neither the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. Beware, keep alert; for you do not know when the time will come. It is like a man going on a journey, when he leaves home and puts his slaves in charge, each with his work, and commands the doorkeeper to be on the watch. Therefore, keep awake—for you do not know when the master of the house will come, in the evening, or at midnight, or at cockcrow, or at dawn, or else he may find you asleep when he comes suddenly. And what I say to you I say to all: Keep awake.”]*

Readings like these are why I felt called and compelled to create *A Women's Lectionary for the Whole Church*. Here we are at the dawn of the season marking the Advent – first and, soon come – of a gender non-stereotypical messiah born of

a mystical and material union between a virgin woman and grammatically feminine Holy Spirit – in the languages in which he and his mama spoke, prayed, read and heard scripture – and, nary a woman or a girl to be found.

And Jesus who did not do what men of his time were supposed to do, marry and produce children, who was a confirmed bachelor – every bit as suspicious in his world as it was in ours for men who did not provide suitable proof of their heterosexuality – Jesus is presented as “the Son of Man.” Jesus who as Sojourner Truth reminded us, “man didn’t have nothing to do with him,” is better identified as and, the Greek expression *huios to anthropou* and its Hebrew and Aramaic antecedents, *ben adam* and *bar enoush*, better translated as, “the Son of Woman” in his case, as indeed we shall shortly affirm in the Creed.

In the year of Our Lady and Non-Binary Angelic Beings 2024 I am still looking for myself in the Scriptures the men of the Church have appointed for me and coming up short. Well, not me. I was never supposed to be here. After all it was the Episcopal Church in which the Diocese of Texas, among others, was founded by a confederate general and physically built by the labor of the enslaved, in which I was never supposed to be able to read or write and certainly not translate the scriptures – in a Church

that still uses the language of darkness to describe all that is wrong and evil. Fix it Jesus. Fix it.

Indeed, my ancestors in this and virtually every church of the age were taught, once they decided we had souls, that to be free in Christ did not mean to be free in this world; the promises of scripture did not apply to us in the same way they applied to others. We were the darkness of the collect prayer – the stain of our skin made clear to those who invented and superimposed the construct of race on us to enslave us while identifying themselves as and with the light. We were the darkness in the heart of darkness in need of civilizing through the light of the gospel and the light of Christ and, through slavery; because Christ and his gospel were insufficient for their purposes. I was never meant to be a priest in this Church. Not as a black woman and not as a woman who is black. In spite of all the women who were prophets throughout the Scriptures and those who proclaimed the resurrection of Jesus and the woman at the well who said “come see a man who told me all I ever did,” and pronounced Jesus the Messiah and then went out

preaching bringing people to knowledge of him, I was not supposed to be here. And I am not alone.

If you are a child growing up in a Church that prays to cast away darkness and its works and, celebrates the triumph of light over darkness and you look in the mirror and see that you are dark, you might not believe you are supposed to be here either. We can talk all we want about how metaphors work and how there was no such concept as race in the world of the Scriptures but since we live in a world, and a nation, that along with the Church in which we worship, has used those metaphors and that scriptural language to commercialize and demonize those with the kiss of holy darkness in their skin then, that language still matters. It still looms; it still reinforces white supremacist hegemony. Fix it Jesus. Fix it.

And, yet I am here at the dawn of 2024 with others who are told every day they don't belong; they are only here on sufferance because we are so progressive and tolerant. Yet, queer kin are not welcome at every level of this Church as far too many learn pursuing a call to ordination. And transfolk are being

helped to discern that these altars and pulpits aren't for them, especially if they don't pass well. Oh, and if you are puzzling over the way I reckon the date, the Medieval Church used to mark the beginning of the year at varying points throughout the Julian year in accordance with a Marian year. Some churches marked the beginning of the year by the turn of the number of the year on the Feast of the Annunciation in March. I am borrowing from that tradition to mark the beginning of the liturgical year as the beginning of our shared calendrical year, to start over and do better than we have done and be better than we have been.

We are starting over and some come to this turning of the year with the hope that this year will be better than the last and some come with no such hope. Some, hoping that we will stop killing each other as a species and, take better care of the species that live on this planet with us and, some have no such hope. Some come hoping that we will finally take seriously the commandment to tend the Earth and serve her and not exploit her, but some have no such hope. Some come hoping we will see the full humanity in each other

without caveats and codicils based on who we love or how we name ourselves or whether or not we conform to gender stereotypes and paradigms and, some have no such hope. Some come hoping to see ourselves in the language, liturgy and lessons of the Church and, some have no such hope. Some come with disappointments petty and profound. Some come hoping Church will be a place we can find ourselves, find ourselves welcome and, bring our whole selves with us when and where we enter. And some have no such hope. Some come bracing for masculine language, hetero patriarchal language and pronouns that assume and exclude. Some come looking for resonances of their cultural heritage in the Church that baptized them. And some come sadly grateful that this pastor, preacher, priest, parish is not as homophobic as the last one. And yet they come, we are told, in ever diminishing numbers. Sometimes I wonder why they come. Fix it Jesus. Fix it.

In this new year, will what we do here matter? Will the telling of the sacred story over the course of the next year transform us to transform this crucified and

crucifying world? Will anything salvific be born of this Advent? There are wars raging before our eyes and some that have slipped from view and some of which we never knew. The Patriarchs of the Holy Land have called for a solemn and somber Advent, that we mourn with the extended family of the Bethlehem Babe we adore but we are going to gorge ourselves with an orgy of excess and consumerism anyway. This year, the angels who rejoiced that silent starry night are weeping as so many in their care weep and rage and grieve, as bodies pile up and are bulldozed into open graves, as buildings and bones are ground to dust together and as blood soaks the Earth. Will we learn to read ancient Israel's aspirational retrospective imaginings of their immigration into Canaan on a tidal wave of blood and violence contextually, rejecting genocide even if it appears on the lips of God, or are we romanticizing and fetishizing some end time theology that has as its end goal the annihilation of the Palestinian people and conversion or extinction of the Jewish people resulting in some fascio-Christian supremacist paradise? Fix it Jesus. Fix it.

That is the prayer of my people, the prayer of my ancestors. Fix it Jesus. No need to say what “it” is. Jesus knows. Jesus hears. Jesus cares. Jesus holds us and loves us and walks with us through the valleys shadowed by death into the spaces of holy transformational darkness so that we never have to walk alone. So many, each in their own way crying out, “Fix it Jesus. Fix it.” Sometimes the “fix” is not a miraculous reversal of all that is wrong with the world or all that has gone wrong in our lives – it almost never ever is. Sometimes we are the fix and we are sleeping on the job. Sometimes the fix is the blessed assurance of a holy companion and comforter as we walk the danger road.

My people prayed for freedom every day of their 460 year enslavement and during the more than 100 years of de facto enslavement created through sharecropping and indebted servitude and the criminalization of black folk in public spaces, Jim and Jane Crow laws, written and unwritten, sundown towns – and in Texas, whole sundown counties – and currently, the retrenchment of voting rights and the establishment of the lucrative prison industrial complex just

waiting for our children along with the incarceration of more black men today than were ever enslaved and, the criminalization of poverty and hunting of black women and men for sport by police officers and private citizens. And now, the denial of our rights to make our own medical decisions – again – a new experience for other women – but one with which some of us are familiar. We prayed and we still pray. Fix it Jesus.

Black folk identify with the Israelites because of our shared history of enslavement. And we also identify with those who read from the perspective of the Canaanites, those whose land was invaded, occupied and colonized, like the first nations of this continent including the Duwamish and Salish, our ancestral mother Africa, our Asian kinfolk and all of the indigenous peoples in Australia and Aotearoa New Zealand. We understand what it means that the Scriptures of Israel were written under oppression and occupation even as ancient Israel used its few cycles of relative privilege to oppress, occupy and enslave its own people as well as those whose land they seized on grounds of theological entitlement.

This may be hard to hear and harder still to identify with in a dominant culture denomination that identified first and easiest as and with enslaver and not as liberator or enslaved, at quite some distance from the occupied and often enslaved early Jesus movement. Liberation theologians and liberation minded biblical interpreters, feminists and womanists and queer theologians call for the readers and hearers and proclaimers of scripture today to ask and consider whether you are truly in the marginalized and subjugated position of the ancient Israelites, or do you wield the privilege of a dominant culture, who should read from the posture of one of the many occupying and colonizing empires, from Egypt to Rome. Because you cannot uphold white supremacy and patriarchy and identify yourself with the virgin of Nazareth and her God-conceived Child.

For the poet-prophet writing in Isaiah's name, there was no longer an ancient Israel. Eight and a half of the twelve tribes had been decimated by the Assyrian Empire centuries ago. The Babylonian Empire had left the remnant of Judah as a shadow of their former selves with puppet

kings, alternately installed by Egypt and Babylon depending on which way the weather and the war blew. And the Persians ended the fiction of the independence of Judah, establishing Yehud as a provincial territory in the Persian Empire. Ground down by wave after wave of oppression, the prophet cried out on behalf of her people:

*O that you would tear open the heavens and come down, so that the mountains would quake at your presence.*

The prophet is saying, come down here and fix this. Fix all of this. Before there was a notion of incarnation in ancient Israel – though surely they were familiar with the stories of other peoples and their gods – they cried out for a God who would come down and set the world aright. In spite of the designation of this passage as an Advent text, they were not praying for a messiah. They had had those in David and even Cyrus of Persia, whom Isaiah, the Second of His Name, called God's anointed, God's messiah in Hebrew and God's christ in the Greek First Testament as David had been so designated centuries earlier. Jesus was not the first messiah in the Scriptures.

Isaiah wanted God Themselves to come down in fire and cloud and smoke and thunder. The prophet remembers the stories passed down of the mighty acts of God in the wilderness, as does the psalmist wincing at the searing image of the burning sanctuary, chopped into kindling during the Babylonian invasion. Both blaming their people and their ancestors for their lot in life, for surely we must have done something to deserve this. Such impoverished theology.

As we look at the horrors in our world that cause us to cry out for God to once again set down on the earth, let us leave that theology in the Iron Age. We are responsible for what we do, not what has been done to us, though we carry the legacy and and bear the consequences of the action and inaction of those who have gone before us. We cry, "Fix it Jesus!" And, *O that you would tear open the heavens and come down*, for those things we cannot fix for ourselves, cannot change by ourselves, cannot heal in ourselves.

This collection of lessons is supposed to guide us on our four week walk remembering the first advent of Christ as we prepare for his second. That coming of

Christ was so all consuming for the Markan community that the author of the gospel later attributed to Mark had no time for Baby Jesus or the Blessed Virgin, for Christ is coming and coming soon! How could he not? Centuries later some of us are asking the same question and praying the same prayers: Fix it Jesus! Fix it. *O that you would tear open the heavens and come down.*

Yet to his own people crying out under Roman occupation, Jesus says, "Stay woke." Stay awake and see the power of the God you think has abandoned you. Stay woke to the signs and seasons and know that Jesus is coming back for a reckoning. Using the paradigm of slavery in which we who are his followers are his slaves, Mark's Jesus is coming back to a Church he expects to find awake to the world and its problems, not waiting for Jesus to sort it all out at the end time. Jesus expects those who serve him, who are bound to him, to do the work he has left us to do. But too many are asleep to the voices calling out for divine intervention because they cannot count on the Church to remediate its own harm or even keep its

eyes open to the suffering in it, around it or done by it, in the name of Jesus.

To you I say with Jesus, “Stay woke.” Stay woke to the legacy of white supremacy in the liturgy, language and lessons of the Church. Stay woke to the deification of whiteness in our collects and hymnody. Stay woke to the ways in which patriarchy buttresses white supremacy. Stay woke to classicism in the Church. Stay woke to the marginalization of disabled people. Stay woke to ageism. Stay woke to transphobia. Stay woke to homophobia. Stay woke to antisemitism in the Church, in the Scriptures as well as their interpretation. Stay woke to Christian Zionism and its genocidal claims and the dispossession of

human beings who are also made in the image of God, who are beloved by God, who are the family of God. Stay woke to all the failures of the Church that we can remediate ourselves with contrition, confession, repentance, reparation and then and only then, reconciliation. Stay woke to all we can do on our own before God tears the heavens open and Jesus comes back to fix what little we have left for them to do. Stay woke.

*In the name of the One who waded in the waters of Miryam’s womb, walked the way of suffering as one of the woman-born, and woke from the grasp of death in the deep darkness of the morning. Amen.*



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