**Gospel**: Mark 13:24-37

“But 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. 27Then 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. 29So also, when you see these things taking place, you know that he is near, at the very gates. 30Truly I tell you, this generation will not pass away until all these things have taken place. 31Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.

32“But about that day or hour no one knows, neither the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. 33Beware, keep alert; for you do not know when the time will come. 34It 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, 36or else he may find you asleep when he comes suddenly. 37And what I say to you **I say to all**: Keep awake.”

**Message**: A Lot of Coffee

Happy New Year? Usually at the new year we are often, at least watching, if not in the thick of the action, the blowing of horns, tossing confetti, toasting and kissing our way into the next year. Resolutions are made to improve our health, get out of debt, or do something fun or different. Three weeks into the new year, we’re back to the old habits. This is not quite the scenario Isaiah and Mark are portraying. Isaiah wants God to tear open the heavens, make the mountains quake, cause water to boil and show up personally to get everyone’s attention to realize that God does exist. Repent! Get your act together and return to the faith; return to God. Jesus is saying in Mark’s gospel that there **will be a day** when the angels go out to gather up the faithful, getting them out of harm’s way. There will be no sunlight or moonlight, stars will be falling (meteor shower?) and the powers (gravity that holds all in concert?) in the heavens will be shaken (Isaiah may have been on to something.).

All of that certainly jolts us out of “Ordinary Time” according to the church calendar. In a way, our “ordinary time” has continued over the centuries and millennia in which the “ordinary” means that wars continue in Ukraine, Gaza and Israel. China and Iran still threaten. Nuclear holocaust is ever-present. There are probably other conflicts not big enough to make nightly news reports. Korea continues to send up rockets. Political representatives are being ousted; transgender issues fill the political agenda; the US is still the most incarcerated country in the world. Even the Church and every major religion that holds to a Supreme Being are divided and in conflict. Happy new year. It may be a new year, but it’s still the *same-old-same-old*. We all want to feel good, but, really, but what we really need is to be good. Isaiah called for repentance—turn away from your current path of self-destruction. Advent calls for deliverance—save us. Look to God for human wholeness, for all creation’s wholeness.

The situation now is just as threatening as it was in Rome in the late 60’s CE and as it was in Isaiah’s time. Isaiah tells anyone who might listen to stay alert and watch for signs. Those in the cities were at the biggest disadvantage since political and military strategy says to conquer areas of greatest population. When do troubles arise, drop everything and run. Head for the hills. That may not be too safe either, if God does make the mountains quake. Isaiah is saying that all this trouble is because God has turned his back on us causing great darkness, because God has been driven from the temple. Busts of Roman emperors, statues of Zeus placed in the Jerusalem temple were abominations. Anything that is in place of God is an abomination. **But**, is it God who has turned away? Has humanity created its own darkness by turning away/running away, driving God from the temple of our body, our life? Anything, our denial, our defiance, our disobedience, our ignoring, our opposition, our materialism, our self-centeredness is an abomination that drives God away from us. There is a darkness in those who are in outright defiance of God. Evil strives against God and works to manipulate the divine order to one’s own advantage or misguided thought. The crisis then and now is urgent. What does it profit a person to gain the world and lose one’s life? What is really at stake is **souls**.

Some time between the dark days of Isaiah and the dark days of now, for those of us who strive to walk in God’s light, days may seem bleak, dragging us deeper into a personal or national/corporate darkness, a glimmer of light breaks through, A glimmer of light called HOPE. God did not tear apart the heavens or cause mountains to quake to get our attention. God appeared in the gentlest most loving way—as a baby, offering hope and new life filled with promise and opportunity. Some early Christian communities had become lethargic in their attention to worship and care for community thinking that Jesus was going to return within their generation. As we well know, to God, a thousand years is as a day and a day can be a thousand years. Probably similar for a generation. Jesus would return and physically make everything right. You do it, Jesus! After all this time, many people have stopped looking and waiting. Let’s just get on with life, such as it is.

So far, the literal physical return of Jesus has not occurred; however, do not let the buoyancy of the event go out of your faith. It is a thin veil that separates the dimensions of this world with that of the eternal. This universe, this cosmos, this creation is God’s! The essence of the event is FAITH—God is and has been the main factor in this world in the past, today and tomorrow. The conquest of evil will not be by our own wit and muscle, but by God’s continuing sovereignty. The Messianic HOPE is more than survival or existing. When tears stream down faces and optimism is gone, the promised child of HOPE comes when a broken heart/a cold heart is willing to be mended. Spiritual growth, trusting God who **is in** the world begins to shine forth. Jesus comes to us. Jesus **is** with us. Jesus **has always** been with us. Jesus **always will** be with us guiding us through difficult/dark times. Grace is offered, and healing begins.

This Advent season, let us not focus so much on getting Christmas Eve “done right” with choirs singing, candles glowing, holly and ivy; let us not be consumed with Christmas day and the presents under the tree, new pajamas for the family picture. Let everything we do point to the **Christ child,** the one who came into the world to save the world. We do not have to drink gallons of coffee to stay awake, to be alert, and to watch. Be open to hope. Look for the “holy’ breaking into the daily routine and especially into the horrific. We are all people of an awesome God. Advent is not a time to be passive. However, drink some coffee; have a cookie or two as you watch, pray and listen for opportunity; allow Jesus to guide you into a new tomorrow. Jesus never left us. **Be** the **holy Jesus calls us to be,** breaking through the darkness. The Lord be with you. Amen.

**Prayers of the People**: We thank you, O God for all your mercies and for your loving care for all your creatures. You have given us the gift of life and your guiding hand, and we are grateful for the love and security you have shown us. You have given us opportunities to learn to trust you more and more. In all these ways, Gracious God, help us to be wise in the right use of your benefits, and so direct us in all we do and say that we may be blessings to others, through Jesus our Savior who teaches us daily to pray, “Our Father . . .”

**Prayer of Thanksgiving**: O God, from the abundance of your mercy you have enriched your servants and granted safety. Strengthened by your blessings we are eternally thankful and pray for our blessings to pour out on others whom you have given to us that they too may bless you with unending joy. Amen.

**Benediction**: The God of all hope fill you with all joy and peace so that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit. In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, go in God’s peace to love and serve the Lord.

**Old Testament**: Isaiah 64:1-9

O that you would tear open the heavens and come down, so that the mountains would quake at your presence— 2as when fire kindles brushwood and the fire causes water to boil— to make your name known to your adversaries, so that the nations might tremble at your presence! 3When you did awesome deeds that we did not expect, you came down, the mountains quaked at your presence. 4From ages past no one has heard, no ear has perceived, no eye has seen any God besides you, who works for those who wait for him. 5You meet those who gladly do right, those who remember you in your ways. But you were angry, and we sinned; because you hid yourself we transgressed.

6We have all become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous deeds are like a filthy cloth. We all fade like a leaf, and our iniquities, like the wind, take us away. 7There is no one who calls on your name, or attempts to take hold of you; for you have hidden your face from us, and have delivered us into the hand of our iniquity. 8Yet, O Lord, you are our Father; we are the clay, and you are our potter; we are all the work of your hand. 9Do not be exceedingly angry, O Lord, and do not remember iniquity forever. Now consider, we are all your people.

**New Testament**: 1 Corinthians 1:1-9

Paul, called to be an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and our brother Sosthenes, 2To the church of God that is in Corinth, to those who are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints, together with all those who in every place call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, both their Lord and ours: 3Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. 4I give thanks to my God always for you because of the grace of God that has been given you in Christ Jesus, 5for in every way you have been enriched in him, in speech and knowledge of every kind— 6just as the testimony of Christ has been strengthened among you— 7so that you are not lacking in any spiritual gift as you wait for the revealing of our Lord Jesus Christ. 8He will also strengthen you to the end, so that you may be blameless on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. 9God is faithful; by him you were called into the fellowship of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.

**Advent Wreath Lighting**: **Advent 2023 Week 1**

**One**: Our Advent journey toward Christmas begins when we light the first candle of Advent, the ***Hope*** or Prophecy candle.

I**saiah 60: 1-3**: Arise and shine for your light has come, and the glory of the Lord has risen upon you. For darkness shall cover the earth, and thick darkness the peoples; but the Lord will arise upon you, and his glory will appear over you. Nations will come to your light and kings to the brightness of your dawn.

**Two**: We light this candle as a symbol of Christ our Hope. May the light sent from God shine in the darkness to show us the way of salvation. Come, Emmanuel.

**Light** the **first purple** candle of **Hope**

**Let us Pray: Unison (bulletin)**

Amen