Sunday November 29, 1981

"MY ADVENT DREAM" Mark 13:32-37 Book 10

During the Advent and Christmas season, all of us have a number of dreams. In fact some years ago, Bing Crosby made a song about a Christmas dream famous, "I'm dreaming of a White Christmas." In addition to a Christmas dream, I have an Advent dream. Here's the background of the dream.

Growing up as a young man in the midwest, I often saw signs along the highways, usually in bold letters, announcing that Jesus Christ was coming again and soon! These signs, on sticks like Burma Shave ads, usually carried a warning to shape up. The same basic message could be heard on the radio by certain preachers and it can still be heard today on radio and television and even can be seen on bumper stickers. "Christ is coming! Are you ready?"

My Advent dream is about the coming of Christ again. The scripture reading from the Gospel of Mark read earlier said, "But of that day or that hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. Take heed, watch, for you do not know when the time will come."

The message of Advent and my dream about Advent are both about the coming of Christ into the world, his first coming and his second. In the first coming of Christ into the world at Christmas, almost all of the world missed it--even those who were most expecting a Messiah and those who had predicted it. They missed it because they were looking in the wrong place and were expecting something quite different than a baby in a manger in Bethlehem.

And even when Jesus was a grown man--those who expected the coming of Christ the most, rejected Jesus as that Messiah. Their dream was not about a man who talked about the love of God, or someone who said we are to love our enemies and bless those who persecute us. He also said, "blessed are the meek, blessed are those who mourn; blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness; blessed are the merciful; blessed are the pure in heart; blessed are the peacemakers."

If so many missed the first coming, then also we may be surprised in the second coming. If we expect to see him coming again and want him to solve all our problems and to be a stern judge, we may be dreaming the wrong dream.

Yet again and again in history when events get unusually complex or threatening, the tendency has been to turn to an expectation of Christ's return and in a form that will solve our problems without any effort on our part. People feel that things are in such a mess that only the intervention of God is capable of undoing what has been done. The role of passive dependency is always easier than a stance of responsible involvement. Who has not, like a little child, wanted to gather up all the broken things and take them to Daddy to fix? The impulse to let someone else come in and solve all our difficulties is very strong.

But maybe that's the wrong kind of watching and waiting. We can get diverted from what Christ has called us to do in the present age.

In my Advent dream and also my Christmas dream, I see Christ coming to us again and again. The second coming is always happening and has been ever since the resurrection. We still have to watch and pray in order to see Christ, and if we watch and pray we will see Christ in some surprising places.

Did not Jesus himself tell us--"as you did it unto one of the least of these my brothers and sisters, you did it unto me." Christ is present whenever we reach out in love to someone in need. Christ is present, whenever two or three are gathered together in his name. Christ is here whenever we join him in his work to bring peace among all of us.

In fact, in my Advent dream I see us doing more than simply watching and waiting. I see us actually being of help in bringing the presence of Christ into the world by being "Christ" to others. In the New Testament, the church is described as the "Body of Christ" in the world, and Christ has given this body his Spirit.

So in my Advent dream, I see the church, the Body of Christ,

being Christ present in the world. And this church is made up of people from all races and all nations, rich and poor, the mighty and the humble; made up of people who are forgetting their hates and their fears and their prejudices. In my Advent dream I see this Body of Christ working for peace among all people.

I hope you will make my Advent dream your dream also, and I hope even more that we can put our dream into practice. Christ comes again whenever you or I or the church is Christ to someone else. Amen.