

He was a mess. He had gone one step too far, tested the boundaries beyond their limits and stood in the street flabbergasted.

“Fine,” he thought, “I don’t need her. There are plenty of fish in the sea. The guys are waiting at the bar, eager for my arrival. She’s the one with the problem. Who needs her anyway?”

So off he goes to pursue his dream. His dream for success, fame and fortune and fans, lots and lots of fans. From one gig to the next he ramps up his guitar, and sings his heart out. The words melt people’s hearts. His voice resonates deep in their souls and he can barely push through the crowds wanting photo-ops and autographs.

Now he barely thinks of her and when he does he is quite confident that leaving her was the best thing he had ever done. Look at him now, a mansion, a collection of jacquards, fame and fortune. All her talk of love and commitment, all her talk of righteousness and goodness..... “It’s the simply things, Danny,” she used to say. “It’s the joy of your face upon the pillow when I open my eyes. It is the gratitude that fills my heart when I look at you working in the yard, It is the pleasure I feel resting in your arms and the safety of your heartbeat against my ear. It is companionship and true intimacy I long for, Danny, not fame and fortune.” “She’s just trying to keep me down” Danny thought as he raised another glass to his lips. What does she know anyway?”

Hundreds of “friends” flocked to his mansion, more food and drink than one could imagine. People Magazine named it the party of the year. People slapped him on the back, nearly falling over from too much to drink, women sought to seduce him and dawn brought staggering crowds and swerving cars as they sought their beds, away from the sunrise.

“This is the life,” he said, as he climbed the stairs. “Yes, this is the life,” he thought as he avoided the spilled drinks and cigarette butts. “A life to envy,” he said as he opened his bedroom door. And then, falling to his knees he began to weep. “This is no life at all. Why? Why did I think this would make me happy? Why did I leave the only real thing I ever had in my life?” “Sarah,” he cried. “I’m so sorry! Whatever made me think that the world could make me happy, when true happiness was with you all the time?”

The first Sunday in Advent is a wake-up call. A heartbroken plea from the people of Israel to their beloved Yahweh begging for forgiveness and asking God to take them back.

But, it is too late, they have turned their back on God for so long, that now God is silent. God’s tears have all run dry. God no longer waits.

“Come back!” they cry. “Remember the time you divided the Red Sea and saved us from the hands of Pharaoh? Remember how you guided us in a cloud by day and a fire by night? Remember when you struck the rock when we were thirsty and send manna when we were hungry? Remember when you moved among us and called us by name? Where are you now? Please love us again!”

Not the words we expect to hear on this first Sunday of Advent. Not the image we had in mind when we dressed this morning, still stuffed from turkey leftovers and recovering from Black Friday shopping deals. Not the message to assure us that it’s just another Christmas with 25 shopping days still left.

Today’s scripture jolts the church out of Ordinary Time with the invasive news that it is not time to go shopping. It is time to think about repentance and redemption. “Oh, “ we think, “now we really want to go shopping !”

The prophet Isaiah’s words sting as they land on our ears and we are reminded that the Christ child comes through the brokenness of the world. He comes locked behind the Palestinian wall, or the poverty of Darfur. The Christ child comes to the anger and grief spilling over in the streets of Ferguson, the homeless looking for a safe place to rest in Hartford and the soldier’s just wanting to go home for Christmas in Afghanistan.

Wake up! Matthew says. We cannot have the peace we long for if we keep running, mindlessly, from store to store, mall to mall searching for things to bring us happiness. In our endless scurrying, we fall asleep to this holy season and miss the Christ amongst us. Focused on materials goods, and lesser gods, Our God grows more distant until one day we notice God isn’t there anymore. And so, like the people of Israel, we too cry,

“O that you would tear open the heavens and come down.
Oh that the mountains would again quake at your presence
and your word would come to us, fresh on our ears.”

“We are sorry. We are so very sorry. We have become like rags, ripped from the fabric, soaked in grease and mud, stained with oil and soot. Please God, forgive us and do not remember our mistakes forever.”

Advent is a call to consciousness. It reminds us that we are so easily lulled by the world around us; how quickly and easily we adjust ourselves to noise and distractions.

I was having my hearing checked the other day and my audiologist was telling me how her husband loves clocks. When they settled into their home together, his clocks were everywhere. She thought she’d go insane. They were so loud and annoying, including a cuckoo clock that cuckooed every hour on the hour.

Then one day a friend came to visit and said, “How can you stand the sound of all these clocks? What sounds she said? She realized she no longer heard them. She had adjusted to their sound, shut them out and numbed herself to their incessant ticking.

“Wake up!” says Advent. This is not the time to fall asleep because the world is too loud, or too violent, or too hurtful. None of us wants to watch the scenes of the Ferguson mob, or the bombed in Afghanistan or remember the horrific deaths of the children in Newtown. None of us wants to live abused or in fear for our lives. None of us want to suffer from anxiety and the terror of PTSD. None of us want to be diagnosed with cancer, or face chemotherapy. None of us wants to have our homes go into foreclosure, or work 80 hours a week just to make ends meet. None of us wants to face a life of emptiness with no chance of hope. It is too painful! And so we, like Israel cry out:

“Tear open the heavens and come down! Make your name known that the mountains may tremble. Deliver us!”

And then we wait! And waiting is so hard. It is one thing to wait for Christmas, because we know when it is coming, just like we know when New Year’s and anniversaries and birthdays are coming. It is a passive waiting because we know when the wait will be over.

But waiting for Christ to come or to come again requires something more because we just don’t know when he’ll come or from where. And so we have to decide, will we give up on waiting and simply be lulled to sleep by powers that play to our fears, our prejudices, or self-interests? Or will we be more like a child, looking out the window, watching for her mother to turn the corner after a day on the job. And even though she is out of sight, the child is full of hope, full of expectation, actively waiting for Love to return.

May we approach this season of Advent on ever hopeful tiptoe, watching to catch a glimpse of a savior, sent by Our God, who didn’t forget us after all. Amen