

December 3, Advent 1B (Mark 13:24-37)

## **The Gospel reading speaks of the world ending. For some people in the pews, it is.**

by [Dennis Sanders](#) in the [November 8, 2017](#) issue

Losing a job is traumatic. Part of what makes it so horrible is that you don't really know when it will happen. You go to work, just like any other day. Then you get called into an office and told you are done. The shock of such a wrenching change stays with you for years after the event, long after you've found another job.

This has happened to me more than once. I remember the first time was on a Friday. I had plans for the weekend, and I was finishing things up for the day. Then I got called into the office. The next thing I know, I'm surrendering my badge and being escorted out of the building.

It felt as if the world had ended. And in some ways it had.

The Gospel reading for this week is not the kind of passage we automatically think about when we're kicking off Advent and turning our attention to "the most wonderful time of the year." Mark talks about how "the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light."

Of course, for a lot of people it isn't the most wonderful time of the year. The people in the pews are dealing with various struggles: the loss of a loved one, the sudden loss of a job, drug and alcohol abuse, divorce. And all of these things have a tendency to make people feel like the world is ending.

The season of Advent is about expectation, about waiting for Christ. But often it seems like we are waiting only for the Jesus in the manger. And as important as it is for us to see that the birth of the king of Israel is a humble one, Advent isn't just about waiting for the baby in the manger. It's about expecting Christ here, in our own messed-up lives, right now.

This passage may be about Jesus' second coming, but I think it speaks to us also in the here and now. We are called to be on the lookout for the big return, but we are also to be aware of the many ways Christ appears in the present. Are we alert to see where Christ arrives, breaking through time and space to be present in our lives and the lives of others? And—more to the point—are we willing to be his hands and feet?

In the middle of this Gospel reading, Jesus decides to tell a short parable about a man who goes on a trip and leaves his servants in charge. Each servant is given a job to do, but the head of the household never tells them when he will return. He only tells the doorkeeper to be alert. The household staff is simply to keep doing their jobs.

As we wait for Christ to return, we have jobs to do. What are those jobs? In Mark 6, Jesus gives his apostles authority to preach repentance, cast out demons, and heal the sick. The church today is called to preach to people to change their hearts and lives; it's called to speak out against injustice and to help the sick, the lonely, and the forgotten. This week's text offers a twofold message: Be busy with what Jesus has called us to do as you wait for his return. And be alert to how and where Jesus appears in your own life.

A few years ago, an elderly woman started attending the church where I am pastor. She felt more comfortable at our small church than at the large Lutheran church down the road. Not too long after she started attending, her only son died of cancer. Several members of our church took the time to attend the funeral service. They didn't really know this woman very well yet, but they went anyway. I saw something amazing: in that moment where her world ended, the members of the church became the hands and feet of Christ to her, someone they barely knew.

I think back to that time a decade ago when I lost my job. In that dark time, I received phone calls from friends. My boyfriend, now my husband, was there to take care of me. Looking back, I see Jesus in the acts of love offered by family and friends. As a nation, we are becoming more and more divided; as individuals, we know our neighbors less and less. Jesus calls us to reach out beyond such boundaries and be Christ to one another.