

The Magnificence In the Ordinary - The Season of Advent
A Different View: The Creation Window / Message 1 of 4
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Mission: Teaching the Good News

Vision: A world where everyone is in a relationship with Father

Favorite Activity: Finding magnificence in the ordinary

One of my favorite human characteristics of Jesus Christ is His ability to connect God's majesty and awe to everyday living.

He was the **Teacher**, Morning **Star**, **Light** of the World, **Bread** of Life, **Rock**, The **Word**, Good **Shepherd**, and **Lamb** of God. Even these names pull in the ordinary. The list goes on. Over 50 names identify the Chief **Cornerstone**.

As a faith-based entrepreneur, I have realized that Jesus does what self-employed people do. He breaks barriers, goes it alone, and disrupts old ways for new ones. He steps out to take risks.

For example, His sermon on the mountain¹ delivered a new paradigm of morality. He spoke truth to religious and government leaders and shared God with people who were othered and considered untouchable. He took risks, knowing his journey was to the cross.

Jesus was a master of words, silence, questions, and statements. He knew what to say to connect people to their unique journeys to the Father. Often by drawing attention to the ordinary.

When he showed up at the well, and everyone else was away, he offered living water to a woman without water. With the legal experts and chief priests, Jesus spoke through their language of profit and loss, taxes, and property.

When the Pharisees tried to deceive Jesus and put Him on the spot about paying taxes or not, I imagine He did not blink. "Jesus just said to them,

"Give to Caesar what belongs to Caesar and to God what belongs to God."

The Bible says, "His reply left them overcome with wonder."² Jesus was speaking from their context, their language. He was good!

One theologian, Walter Brueggemann, commented that Jesus was "on the side of those worn down" by people experiencing poverty and who do all the heavy lifting. Jesus spoke to those at the

¹ Matthew 5-7 (CEB)

² Mark 12:13-17

bottom and top of the social ladder, “those worn out by the heavy demands of the Torah, and those who make the Torah filled with judgment and exclusion.”

But, the “yoke” of Jesus is just the opposite.

There were and are no barriers to God. Whether you are younger or older, 8 or 80 years of age, there are no qualifications, no exclusions. There are no ethnic requirements, class, or gender distinctions. None of these makes any difference to the Son. The burden of discipleship is easy. With every move, he holds up the sign that reads, all are welcome here.

That brings us to the use of parables. Parables were a common practice in Judaism and were the perfect teaching tool for the scrappy disciples. On the other hand, unbelievers and skeptics who heard them did not understand the truth.³

So, Jesus reveals the gospel's truth with lost sheep, coins, an unforgiving servant, bridegrooms, fishing nets, a builder's stone, and today's story about a fig tree. He met folks where they were and through their lens. The ordinary reveals understanding and makes the unknowable, invisible God tangible.

Jesus told stories that could be absorbed through the senses and connected to the human experience. Parables placed the ordinary front and center so those with open ears could hear, feel, touch, and taste the Gospel. The fig tree was a tasty everyday food source.

These stories were memorable and repeatable by those who were hungry to hear. Hearing them again and again reconnects them (us) with newness in Christ.

We sit under the creation window this morning to hear about this parable from a different perspective (view). Whether this is your first hearing of the parable or our 100th hearing, I have a request this morning.

Even though this story is over 2000 years old, I hope you will receive it as if it's hot off the press. Our hearing is fresh today, and like the disciples we are, we have permission to ask questions and wrestle with the text. If that sounds good, would you say Amen?

Welcome to our first Sunday of Advent. Advent means arrival. It is a season of holy watching and waiting. Both are already on our radar because we have had a few new arrivals. If you are visiting us today or online, let me explain.

Our new mission statement has arrived, and if you have yet to hear it, I promise to share how beautiful we are in Christ.

In just a few weeks, a new year arrives and, in the pulpit, “For such a time as this,” a new interim pastor. And I know you have seen it. There is even a new sign by the entrance. If you served on the sign replacement committee, please stand for a well-deserved thank you.

³ John MacArthur, *The MacArthur Bible Commentary* (Nashville, Thomas Nelson, Inc., 2005), 1207.

Each of these arrivals says Sardis has been waiting and watching in “hope and a future.”⁴

Based on all this newness, we are alert in our relationship with God, fellowship with the Holy Spirit, and new community with Sardis. We will continue the path by calling out the ordinary.

Today, our ordinary is the creation window. The following weeks will include three other ordinary items: a candle, a bell, and a book. Our prayer is to call out the ordinary and call in community, belonging, and faith. As we prepare for the birth of the Christ child, we point to hope, love, and peace in our lives and for others. Will we do it? “Keep watch.”

Watching the ordinary is a “discipline of simplicity.” “An inward reality that results in an outward lifestyle.”⁵ Our inward reality is the truth of The Trinity. Our outward lifestyle is how we experience magnificence in the ordinary.

Even in silence and their presence, the ordinary invites us to live in God’s story. As you look through the creation window, what do you see? The changing seasons, a broken branch, squirrels running to the highest point possible? Kathryn, is that an Elm and a Maple tree we see? There is more! Keep watch!

In today’s text, Jesus sits on the Mount of Olives with his inner circle, Peter, James, John, and Andrew.

I like how this pericope begins with a metaphorical description. Scholars agree that it does not mean creation will be destroyed at the Lord’s coming, but rather, “even the powers of heaven and earth do not compare to God’s power.”⁶ That’s the symbolism.

Here, Jesus does not point to the easy yoke of the good news. He points to the messy and troubling signs. False prophets, people pretending to be the Christ, and deceivers who will go after the disciples. I am sure Jesus is thinking about His difficult road to the cross and is trying to warn the four to stay on point, to pay attention to the signs, and not to be fooled.

He does this by pointing to the ordinary, a fig tree. It is a slow food source that takes about 36 months after planting for leaves to appear and figs to grow. But, if all goes well (after three years of waiting), figs arrive twice a year. Here is the parable again.

⁴ Jeremiah 29:11

⁵ Richard J. Foster, *Celebration of Discipline: The Path to Spiritual Growth*, (New York: Harper Collins, 1998), 79-95.

⁶ R. Alan Culpepper, *Mark: Smyth & Helwys Bible Commentary*, (Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys, 2007), 465.

He tells the disciples, "Learn this parable from the fig tree. After its branch becomes tender and sprouts new leaves, you know summer is near."⁷

He tells them how to watch and what to watch for by giving a cause-and-effect statement. Jesus points to the importance of recognizing the progression of truth. We can't just watch one event but must also care for the why. Why is it happening? In other words, watch for the big picture.

Do you remember flowers blooming all over Charlotte just a few weeks ago? It's not a sign we expect to see in October, but warm temperatures confused Mother Nature. Did anyone plant their Summer garden or begin to watch for new fawns in their yard? If we had not been (alert, awake, aware) the warm weather signs of flowers blooming could have caused us to miss the truth.

The truth is, it's Fall. Winter is coming.

The message to the disciples was this. When you see this one thing (branches sprouting new leaves) during Biblical times, it is a sign that something is coming. (Summer is near). Don't be fooled by false signs and pretenders, "watch out, keep watch, be alert."

Sometimes, living can reveal false signs that distract us from the truth and steer our attention away, just like spring flowers in the fall. They are as beautiful and smell just as lovely, AND...draw our attention away from the falling leaves (the actual signs of Fall in Charlotte, NC).

This brings me to the idea of attention. Did you know that Attention is the number one commodity today? Much of the world is vying for our attention, often to buy or see something. Sometimes, it distracts us from the truth, lulls us to sleep, and confuses us with other signs. Experts say if you can get someone's attention, that's the first step.

But God, in Jesus, has an app (application) for that. "Watch out!"

Other translations of the Greek are:

"Be alert"(CSB)

"Watch" KJV, The Message, (NIV, NKJV, ASV, GNT)

"Keep watch" (MSG)

"Be on the alert" (NASB)

"Keep awake" (NRS)

"Stay alert" (CEB, CJB, ESV)

This is the yellow light, the warning to slow down before you get to the dangerous curve, a caution tape that reminds us to be careful how we walk. In a very ordinary way, Jesus prepares us to look for signs and reject false signs to remain in truth and righteousness. Some signs are written down for us to write in our hearts.

⁷ Mark 13:28

“Jesus said, “I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.”⁸

“And you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.”⁹

“God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth.”¹⁰

“The Lord is near to all who call on him, to all who call on him in truth.”¹¹

“Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice at wrongdoing but rejoices with the truth.”¹²

Hallelujah! Written in your heart. God’s Word will never pass away.¹³

All of this is relevant for this moment of Advent. Like the fig tree, Sardis is growing in new and beautiful ways. Our branches are tender with change, and further growth is beginning to show. Keep watching!

As we look out of the Creation Window, Jesus asks us to look in, pay attention, and be alert so that hope is alive in the people we touch and everywhere we go.

Hope is the belief that something good will happen in the future. For you and me, this means the hope of salvation and redemption through the birth of Jesus Christ. Hope brings us together and reminds us that we are not alone. The creation window serves as our CTA (call to action). To keep watch for ourselves, each other, and Christ's newness in our hearts.

I want to encourage us to engage our curiosity and interest to recognize the signs (the magnificence of God) around us. Brene Brown says curiosity is how we think and feel, and interest is how we engage the world.¹⁴

First, we watch by scanning the landscape in our lives, surveying the emotional hills and valleys of those around us. Then, we can pick up with curiosity and interest. How are you? What worries you today? How are you feeling? What can I do for you today? Great questions of curiosity and interest.

⁸ John 4:16

⁹ John 8:32

¹⁰ John 4:24

¹¹ Psalm 145:18

¹² 1 Corinthians 13:4-6

¹³ Mark 13:31

¹⁴ Brene Brown, *Atlas of the Heart: Mapping Meaningful Connection and the Language of Human Experience*, (New York: Harper Collins Publisher, 2021), 63-66.

What are you curious about, listening to, and paying attention to?

How will you protect your heart and relationships and guard your spiritual practices in Christ?

Archimedes was a famous Greek mathematician and inventor. He said, "Give me a place to stand and a lever long enough, and I will move the world. "

We have the lever in the Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit. Where will Sardis stand? Where will you stand?

How can we watch over each other to ensure everyone here and in our coming and going knows the love of God?

How can we pour into you to help you build community and connection right now?

My brothers and sisters in Christ, only the Father knows when the Master of this house is coming. Until that time, with the help of the Holy Spirit, we are ready, willing, and able to keep watch over you, with you, and if need be, for you.

There will always be different views in the world. Not all will be good, not all will be bad, not all will be left, not all will be right. So keep watch, in Jesus' name.

The hope candle is lit. It is time to light the candle of hope in our hearts.
It will be the difference in the life of this church and our faith.

Trust your work "individually and inward" to grow spiritually and keep watch over yourself. Our "present responsibility is to stay connected with God and others and keep watch! Lastly, trust what you know as a follower of Christ. Continue to disciple like it's 1999 years ago. Keep watch!¹⁵

I promise you, there is magnificence in the ordinary.
God is here. Hallelujah!

¹⁵ Larmar Williamson, Jr, "Mark: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching (Louisville, John Knox Press, 1973), 242.