

Isaiah 64:1-9
Psalm 80:1-7, 17-19
1 Corinthians 1:3-9
Mark 13:24-37

Sermon December 3rd, 2023

We Long for Christ's Presence!

In our gospel, Jesus is sharing some last words with his disciples before the authorities come to arrest him. Last words to prepare them for the grief, persecution, and suffering they are about to endure on behalf of being followers of Jesus (**Image One:** someone suffering). Last words that give them hope in the midst of their suffering. Last words that talk about a promise of Jesus's return, a promise of Christ's presence being experienced in the midst of their suffering (**Image Two:** picture of Jesus). So that they will feel empowered by this promise of Jesus's return, Christ's presence, to continue to passionately share the good news of Jesus throughout Galilee, Jerusalem, Samaria, and into the Gentile world.

Thirty years later, Mark chooses to share these words of Jesus with his community to give them hope in the midst of living through a time where the Roman Empire is persecuting Christians widely and harshly (**Image One**). "Hang in there." Mark speaks. "The time is coming near where we will see Christ's presence coming on the clouds, liberating us from our suffering. Breathing God's justice into our world in its fullness. (**Image Two**)"

This hope in Christ's eventual return, this hope in Christ's presence gives the early followers what they need to endure the suffering they face, empowering them to keep sharing the good news of Jesus to those in Galilee, Jerusalem, Samaria, and even Rome.

Christian leaders over the centuries continue to share these words of Jesus from the pulpit giving Christians hope in Jesus's eventual return, hope in this experience of Christ's presence as they face suffering from persecution, war, famine, grief, loss, pain (**Image One**). Giving them what they need to keep sharing the good news of Jesus to those in their communities.

And as we sit here today, and listen to these words, we reflect on how these words, this promise that we will bear witness to Jesus' return, that we will experience Christ's presence in its fullness, and all the justice and goodness that comes with this promise, helps us face our suffering with hope, with passion (**Image Two**). So, to continue to share the good news of Jesus with the world. So, to continue to reveal where we see God's justice and goodness acting in the world in the here and now. So, to continue to

reveal where we see Christ's presence touching this world in the here and now. Even if we don't experience this justice, goodness, and presence in its fullness.

Because we all long to feel Christ's presence in the midst of our suffering (**Image Two**). We all long to feel renewed by this presence, so to, keep living out our faith in the world. We don't want to let our suffering stop us from revealing what Christ is doing in the world (**Image One**). We don't want to let our suffering pull us away from our Creator, our Redeemer, our Sanctifier.

We all want to feel Christ's hand holding ours when our loved one dies. We all want to see Christ's justice come to fulfillment when we see someone suffering unjustly. We all want to experience Christ's peace when war breaks out. We all want to bear witness to Christ's healing power when addiction, persecution, and pain try to take over our lives. We all want to believe that even if suffering is all we can see at the moment, that the Advent Candle of hope finds a way to catch our attention. That Christ's light, Christ's presence will find its way into our hearts in the midst of the darkness (**Image Two**).

Like a child who longs for their parent when they are hurting. No one else will do. Give me Mommy. Give me Daddy. I don't want anyone else in this moment. Like a child who longs for their parent in the midst of their pain, we long to feel Christ's presence in the midst of our suffering.

Because feeling someone's presence in the midst of our suffering is everything. Having someone to hold, to touch, when everything is hurting is everything. We all have been in that place where we are hurting, and we know that in the moment a loved one embraces us with a hug or with a touch on our hand, this feeling of comfort and peace comes over us.

We long to feel Christ's presence in the midst of our suffering (**Image Two**). It is why these words we hear today fill our hearts with hope. One day Jesus will return to us. One day we will experience Christ's presence in its fullness. One day we will see God's justice and goodness in its fullness.

But as we await the day of Jesus' return, he doesn't leave us high and dry. Though the Christians of every generation hope in Jesus' return to earth, we all believe Jesus has breathed on us the Holy Spirit. We believe Jesus has called us as the church to be revealers of Christ's presence in the here and now (**Image Two**).

We believe we experience Christ's presence through different rituals and practices of our faith. For example, we experience Christ's presence through being in service for others. Especially, when we see how this presence changes the people we reach out to. We experience Christ's presence through sharing in Christ's body and blood with others. Especially, when we see how this table brings people together from all walks of

life. We experience Christ's presence in the stories we hear in the Bible. Especially, when these stories help us see where God is acting in our lives. We experience Christ's presence through prayer. Especially, when we bear witness to God's answer. We experience Christ's presence when we gather together in worship. Especially, when we hear God's voice speaking to us through our favorite hymn or in the sermon.

Like the story of the disciples on the road to Emmaus, we see that we do experience Christ's presence (**Image Two**). Not always. Not in its fullness. But we do experience it. And it is in these experiences of Christ's presence, that we find strength to keep sharing the good news of Jesus with the world. It is in these words that we hear in our gospel, that we have hope in the day when Jesus will come again, bringing us into an age where all will experience God's justice and goodness in its entirety.

Let us pray, as we live in this broken world where suffering is relentless and unending, open our eyes to see your light of hope, to see where your presence is touching our lives in the here and now. Empowering us to keep sharing the good news. Empowering us to keep revealing where your goodness and justice are at work in the world in the here and now. **Amen.**

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