The Bethel Pulpit

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Text: Mark 13:24-37
Title: Hope

The church year calendar has always been unsettling to me. I have pretty much always wanted them both to start at the same time; until this year, I have wanted them both to start on January 1st. Advent is out of step with the calendar year. Day to day we X out the days; there's a strong voice telling us to hurry up because the days are counting down. Get out there and get your Christmas shopping done before it's too late. But this year, the approach of Advent has created a palpable tension. The commercialized count down to Christmas has been torn in two. At first it was unsettling and confusing. I felt out of sync with other staff members, I felt out of step with the world. I couldn't figure out what exactly was happening. The only choice I had was to just go with it, keep moving forward until the pieces took shape in a new way.

On the day the community meal was served in Borgwardt Hall, a new clarity began to take hold. I was called upon to say the prayer before the meal so many people helped to make possible. Standing off to the side as the hungry filed in the doors, I began to think about how down right difficult it is for most of the gathered just to stay alive. The nights were getting colder. For me it's just a matter of turning up my thermostat or grabbing a sweater or another blanket, but that's not the case for the men and women that were served on that day or any other day.

The time came, and I stepped up to say the prayer before the meal. "We pray." At that instant God broke into my world, it was chaotic initially. The usual elements of the mealtime prayer sounded shallow and nearly meaningless in a room overflowing with homeless people. As a rule, I pray that God will bless the food we are about to eat to strengthen us to be a blessing to the world, and often I add a few words asking God to comfort and supply food for those who don't have enough.

God's reign broke in – for a split second I wasn't sure I could do it. The words weren't coming, and my eyes began to fill with tears. There had to be different words to pray, words one says when you realize you have been richly blessed, and it's time to take from those blessings to be a blessing to and for others. On that day it was a room filled with people living on the sharp edge of life and death. As I held back my tears, hope began to do it's work. The out of sync feelings I had before began to shift into the newness God was creating in me. Some of the confusion subsided, and being out of step with the world became more comfortable. Being out of step with the world felt like I was walking with Jesus.

I wasn't looking for God, but God was looking for me, wanting to make space, wanting to this servant to wake up and live in God's promise of hope while we live each day. We can't keep watch for God in our midst if we haven't left space for God to show up. Or rather God will show up and we will miss the glorious moment. The time of prayer before the meal created just the space God needed to break into my day. God was there sitting at the table.

The days until Christmas are rushing by us. In the hustle and bustle of the festivities and activities, carve out some space for the Holy One. Please, take this Advent calendar home and take a little bit of time each day to We are God's servants. We have commandments to guide us, but no one is keeping score on how we are doing, not even God. Space for the Holy One in your life we change your view of life. Space for the Holy One will turn you around and give you hope.

Take this Advent calendar home, take a Hope candle home with you today. Commit to making space for the Holy One. Maybe all you have time for is praying the simple prayers every day, do it. Set the candle on the table or your desk or your bathroom counter, your kitchen table - light it, and slowly say the prayer. God will show up. Most of us go to the grocery store during the week – consider making your own box and filling it with the items noted throughout the month. Do it as a family whether you are a family of one or a family of 6. Make space for the Holy One, and prepare to be changed. You too might find you are out of step with the world and more instep with God.