

December 3, 2017 1st Sunday of Advent

Isaiah 64:1-9, 1 Corinthians 1:3-9

Rev. Jen Nagel, University Lutheran Church of Hope

Mark 13:24-37

Blessing When the World is Ending, Jan Richardson.

David Schnasa Jacobsen writing for this date in Working Preacher. Nadia Bolz Weber, Accidental Saints, pgs 68-69.

Blessings in the name of the One who was, and the One who is, and the One who is to come. Amen.

Growing up, Chris and Erik Olson lived in the house across the street from me.

Chris was three years older, Erik was three years younger, and we played, a lot, a whole lot.

Chris, in particular, loved trucks, especially semi trucks, 18-wheelers, and he had more than a fair share of kid rigs, enough to supply the rest of us.

They were maybe 15 inches long and 4 inches high, in all sorts of colors,

modeled after the ones we'd see rumbling through our small town,

modeled probably with some advertising agreement for getting us hooked on this carrier or that.

What was the very best, was that Chris' bedroom had plaid carpet.

Now, some of you know exactly what I'm describing, maybe you still have that carpet, and others are questioning my judgment and my memory 35-40 some years later, but it was amazing.

It was dark carpet, navy blue-ish, with these thin lines of red and gold and green weaving back and forth.

What's more, it provided the perfect civil engineering course for driving the semi trucks around the bedroom.

With that plaid pattern at our disposal: roads, lots of roads, and with each road came the corresponding intersection—that's just how plaid is.

Intersection after intersection, turn after turn, driving lanes, passing lanes, and still more intersections.

The Intersection of Everything, that is our theme this Advent.

It's a theme honed by our Worship Planning Team and inspired by scripture and artwork and reflections when a bigger group gathered for a Wednesday evening workshop over pizza.

Today my goal is to introduce that theme: **The Intersection of Everything.**

That intersection, that sacred, holy, space where in the coming of Jesus Christ, earth and heaven meet.

God and creation, time and space,

the worries of this world and the great promise of healing, of wholeness, intersecting.

Life and life eternal. Need and plenty. Unity and difference.

Coming from different directions, different perspectives, different planes, different experiences, different dimensions...and we're intersecting.

Because that's what the vulnerable, powerful birth of Jesus does, it brings us together.

Not together in agreement about everything, but together, intersecting,
often with tensions, sometimes urgency, intersecting.

Because in that space, God is born, and God meets us, and God claims us for love, transforming love.

This amazing painting by Phil Thompson, is called "Madonna and Christ Child in the City".

Phil and his spouse Joy are long-time members of our congregation.

Phil is a retired art professor from Augsburg.

If you look around our building, a lot of Phil's artistry graces our space—what a gift.

This one usually hangs right over here, in that transept where the choir and I get a good view.

For this season, we want to take a better look at it, let it be a visual focus to draw us all into the
intersections.

Next Sunday another one of our artists, Muffi Abrahamson, will help us explore it more.

For today, take time to notice the intersections, the city scape (look familiar?!), the orbs that remind me a bit
of the sun and the moon, maybe the stars, and Mary and Jesus, right at the intersection of it all.

Today's Gospel reading from Mark is often called the Little Apocalypse.

By next week we'll hear the beginning of the Gospel, but today, on the first Sunday of Advent, the first
Sunday of the church year, *we start at the end*, right before Jesus' crucifixion.

Mark has been telling the story, step by step: and then Jesus did this, and then he did that.

But for this brief set of verses, Mark changes his pace, like the narrator looking up and realizing that the
audience is right there and there are things they need to hear.

Keep awake, Mark has Jesus say, seemingly right to Mark's community, 40 years after Jesus lived.

For that community is in a crisis: the temple has been destroyed and it is a catastrophe.

That temple was their intersection, the center of religious and political and economic life.

Over a period years the Romans destroyed it, and threatened the very existence of the Jewish community.

Their world is shaken by this suffering, this death.

Shaken so much so that these predictions in the gospel aren't about endings like we may hear them,
but rather the hope of beginning, something new, something so desperately needed.

So keep awake, for God's love is so powerful that the heavens will be torn open and the Son will return.

Keep awake. That second coming, like the birth of Jesus,

is an intersection, a sacred, holy space where we are told we will meet God again.

For a moment, I also want to turn to another intersection that is part of our focus this Advent season.

That intersection is the one we hear about in the first chapter of Luke, where the angel Gabriel comes to

Mary, a young woman, 13, perhaps 15 years old, a peasant, unexpected in every way.

“Greetings, favored one,” Gabriel whispers and explains all that will happen.

Do you remember how Mary responds?

She says, “Let it be with me according to your word” ... “Let it be with me.”

Then she echoes Hannah, the prophet Samuel’s mom, so many years before, with the words of the

Magnificat, “My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,”

God, you’ve looked with favor on your lowly servant, they’ll call me blessed,

The hungry will be filled, the lowly lifted up, the proud scattered.

Mary and her bold, brave Magnificat are before us this season.

Nadia Bolz Weber writes, “Mary had some real chops.

She heard outrageous things from an angel and said, ‘Let it be with me according to your word’...

Maybe the really outrageous act of faith on Mary’s part was trust that she had found favor with God.”

Nadia goes on, we want to think “that if I live a certain kind of life, I can make myself worthy of God. But

what if God’s word is so much more powerful than our ability to become worthy of God?...”

Maybe this is the “vital and overlooked miracle of the Annunciation story.”

That favor, that graceful favor, dear ones, is an intersection for us to ponder this season.

My hope this first Sunday of Advent is to get us noodling about intersections,

The Intersection of Everything.

What in your life is intersecting? And how is that?

Where is God meeting you again? Where do you pray that God would meet you?

What are you avoiding or ignoring? What intersections are frightening you?

Advent is a perfect season to stay alert, awake, to where God is showing up in new beginnings.

It’s a time in all the hubbub and demands to live counter-culturally and to pause,

to make a holy, sacred space to listen again:

maybe that’s using an advent devotion or advent candles, or meditating on a line in a Christmas carol

Maybe it’s coming to Wednesday Holden Evening Prayer, or taking home the bulletin and letting yourself

ponder the Phil’s artwork or the poetry or the scripture passages.

These intersections, this is where God meets us with hope, with new beginnings, with trust anew.

God will find you, that’s a promise, and God will be born in you, in us, at the intersection of everything.

Before I close, let me lift up one final intersection, the intersection between this life and life eternal.

As a congregation we are trying to find ways of marking the passing of those within our community, a way of seeing the arc created by the waters of baptism and the unshakeable love of Christ Jesus that holds us in our living and in our dying and in our living eternally.

Today we're remembering Margaret Vainovskis, a long-time member of Hope who died on Tuesday.

Margaret raised her children Kathy, Cheryl, Jim and Jerry here in SE, near Como and 17th.

To this day, her family—kids, grandkids, great grandkids, great-great grandkids—they make that space their hub.

Margaret cared—that's who she was: caring for children, caring for elders, caring for cats, caring for her family.

Even while she lived with tremendous pain for many years, she was the glue, the hub, the intersection, always welcoming, always connecting people.

And now she rests in God's eternal peace.

**When we live, we live to the Lord, when we die we die to the Lord,
so then whether we live or whether we die, we are the Lord's.**

[At the font]

It's in that spirit that I invite you into prayer:

Holy God, holy and powerful, we remember before you today our sister Margaret.

We thank you for giving her to us to know and to love as a companion in our pilgrimage on earth.

At these waters of baptism you welcomed her into your love.

At these waters you comforted her in times of trouble and encouraged her in delight.

At these waters you now enfold her into Jesus' death and resurrection and the promise of life everlasting.

Console us who mourn and bring us together with all the saints of God.

In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.