

Sermon: Forecast Cloudy Text: Mark 13:24-37 Advent 1 - December 1, 2019
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It's a holiday weekend south of the border and as people travel there is much talk of the weather. Our southern neighbors like to speak of the weather using dramatic terminology. When it's cold in winter American weather forecasters talk about the *Polar Vortex*. When it snows as it did during this Thanksgiving holiday, they call the snow storm a *bomb cyclone*.

Here in Canada we talk about weather a lot, albeit in less dramatic terms. Apparently Canadians are addicted to internet weather forecasting sites. We have weather apps on our phones so we can always check to see what's coming right now in the moment. We get lots of weather in Canada and so we pay attention to changes in climate. And with global climate changes, our weather is now more extreme and so we really do want to check the forecast to see what lies ahead.

In my grandfather's generation they also paid attention to weather. He was a farmer and he used the technology of the day to monitor the conditions that effected crops, and dictated what he could do in the fields. He had a barometer in his den to watch for changes in air pressure. Rain gauges measured rain fall. A weather vane showed wind direction. A large thermometer monitored changes in temperature. And in his day, you watched the clouds, which could tell you about impending rain or snow, about changes in coming weather.

In Mark's gospel, Jesus speaks of a coming cloud, a cloud that will "bear the Son of Man with power and great glory ..." What sort of cloud is the gospel describing? Is it a friendly, fluffy cloud that portents a light sunny day, or a dark threatening that promises rain and storm, wind and snow?

In the gospel Jesus tells us that those who are accustomed to looking into the sky to predict the weather need to look up and see what future is coming. We are to look up to discern the signs of the times. What do you see coming our way? What does the future hold? If we look up in faith what kind of clouds will we see gathering on the horizon? Hopeful clouds or threatening ones...?

I know many younger people who look to the weather, to climate change and weather that grows more extreme and they worry and sometimes despair- about their future and the future of the planet.

What do you see on the horizon?

In various places in Scripture, clouds are mentioned. A cloud, in the Hebrew understanding, was a symbol for the presence of the Holy One.

- A pillar of cloud leads Israel from slavery towards the Promised Land.
- A cloud descends on Mt. Sinai when Moses receives the covenant carved in stone.
- On the Mount of the Transfiguration God's voice is heard coming from the cloud.

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Is the cloud in the Gospel read today an inspiring sign or an ominous one? Maybe it depends on who you are and where you are. In any case a cloud in the tradition of Scripture is a sign, a sign of the coming of the presence of God.

A storm cloud can be a good thing. Farmers may long for rain after a period of drought. Skiers, God bless them, are happy when it snows.

The average Palestinian Jew in Jesus time lived a hard, brutal and short life: grinding poverty; heavy taxes that were paid to Rome. They were living under military occupation. Jesus spoke to people who hoped that the world as they knew it would end. They longed for God to sweep the stage clean and to build a new world, a world of peace and justice. If there were storm clouds gathering they would look up and be filled with hope.

And how about you? Are there things in this world that you would like to see changed? Are their injustices that you hope might be swept away? Inequalities, burdens, challenges, oppressions that you would not miss were they to end? Do you have hope that these changes will come, that circumstances will shift? Enough hope to move you, to motivate you to work for the change you hope for...? Do you hope for a divine and stormy cloud to appear on the horizon of your world?

When Jesus comes the first time we welcome him, the tiny baby of Bethlehem. But the first Sunday of Advent is more about the Second Advent - where the one we welcome is not an infant. He comes on clouds, with power.

Of the second coming the poet WB Yeats, from under the dark storm clouds of the First World War , writes forebodingly: *And what rough beast, its hour come round at last, Slouches towards Bethlehem to be born?* (WB Yeats: *The Second Coming* *)

So see those clouds on the horizon? What kind of weather do they bring? The gospel today does not tell us what is coming, what the future holds, or what future is coming our way. It doesn't tell us if the coming clouds are dark or bright. Instead it tells us **who** is coming with those clouds.

To paraphrase CS Lewis: In this life, we have great battles, they are real and painful. But we know who has won the war. There is still struggle in our lives now, but we have a promise of how it will all end.

The gospel for today:" ...people will see the Son of Man coming in clouds with great power and glory. "

So...Come Lord Jesus Come. And give us hope.
Amen