

“Our Hope in Suffering”

1 Peter 2:11-25, Psalm 126, Isaiah 64:1-4, 8-11

One of the most bizarre things for me about moving to Switzerland has been *Advent*. I’ve celebrated Advent my entire life. But only in *church*. I never saw an Advent wreath outside a church or a Christian home before. I hardly ever saw Advent calendars before, and I certainly never saw an Advent calendar that wasn’t *religious* before moving here. It’s so strange to me that Advent is not just a Christian, but also a secular observance, here. This is my and Ellie’s second year tasting our way through a Swiss beer Advent calendar.

I’m going to ruin your Christmas spirit for a minute, if that’s ok. The problem with Advent becoming a “holiday season” is that it comes every year. Once a year. For four weeks. It’s predictable. We know when it will be. And we know what to expect. So we don’t even need to *expect* it. Retailers remind us that it’s here. Chocolate makers make sure we don’t forget. And when it comes we hurry up and get our seasonal decorations out and make our Christmas gift-buying lists and find our ugly Christmas sweater for the office party.

But *Advent* doesn’t *mean* all that. Advent means *appearing*. *Manifestation*. *Stunning surprise*. Advent is not meant to fulfill our expectations so that we’re comfortable. Advent is meant to remind us that our typical expectations are pathetic. It’s meant to disrupt our expectations, to overthrow our seasonal rhythms. Advent gives us *new* expectations that have nothing to do with chocolate or cards or calendars or pageants or even “church.”

Advent the “seasonal holiday” is the market’s way of saying “I know it’s been a hard year, but here’s some candles and some chocolate and some gluhwein. Feeling cozy? Great. Now go buy something, please, so we can end the year with a profit.” Advent around here feels like the world is trying to make us comfortable. But Advent in the Bible is a reminder that we weren’t meant for this world. Not as it is.

Peter helps us with this. He’s got 4 things for us today. Four things that will ruin our holiday spirit but give us an experience instead of the Holy Spirit.

He interrupts our “advent season” to tell us

We are not *of* the world

We *are* in the world

We are not in this alone

We *are* in this *in Christ*

We are not *of* the world

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The first thing to recognize is that, if you and I are following Jesus, we are not of the world. Over and over, Peter makes this clear.

Whatever we do, verse 13, we do “for the Lord’s sake.” No other motivation ultimately matters.

No matter who *seems* to be in charge, we know that the Lord God is really in charge, and so twice Peter says we fear God alone (17, 18). Wouldn’t it be amazing not to fear people? It’s possible—if we fear the Lord. As God’s child, no human criticism ultimately matters. You’ve got a boss whose assessment of who you are and what you do is accurate, and whose standards are just. Fear the Lord, not people.

Verse 20—Peter says that because we’re not of the world, we don’t need *people* to congratulate us for being so wonderful. Rather, what matters is that our attitudes, words, and actions are commendable in *God’s* sight. Of *course* we are looking for a “well done.” We might get it from people. We might not. But the only thing that ultimately matters is that we get it from the Lord.

So it’s the Lord’s critique and the Lord’s commendation alone that ultimately matter. We are not *of* the world.

What else? Verse 19—Peter says that our awareness of God must govern all our attitudes and actions, even in the most frustrating or humiliating circumstances. The people who *hurt* us can’t have our full attention: only the Lord dominates our consciousness.

But even more, whatever we do, verse 12, is done because we want to see God, who we treasure above all, glorified. We want the world to see him as the glorious God that we know him to be. We see people in our lives as people who need to see God’s glory. And that’s why we do what is right. Not for us, only indirectly for people, and ultimately only for the Lord and his glory.

And finally, to really ruin the holiday spirit, Peter says, we are God’s *slaves* (16). Before Peter even *recognizes* that there are people living in some form of worldly slavery, he says, look: the only one to whom you are ultimately captive is to the good and great God of glory. No master has any claim on you, ultimately, except the Lord.

To have hope during Advent means, first of all, that we don’t belong to the world. We certainly do not belong to the rebellious world. Not to the world that praises popularity, the world that

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rewards power with more power. We don't belong to the world that tries to plant desires in us, and then sell us things to satisfy those desires. We don't belong to the world that promises political or market solutions alone as a response to our suffering. We don't belong to our critics, and we do not belong to our fans, either. We belong to God. How's that for an advent wake up call? How's that for the appearance of something new and world-shattering and glorious?

We are not *of* the world, says Peter.

We *are* IN the world

But while our lives are not defined by the world and its authorities and its criticism or its commendation, we are still *in* the world.

This means (11) that we're exiles and foreigners. Our citizenship is in God's kingdom, but we're resident aliens here. We are following Jesus among pagans (12). Europe in Peter's day was thoroughly pagan. Europe for millennia was mostly Christian. Europe today? Mostly pagan. Peter's message: if we could survive and thrive in this environment in the first century, you can survive and thrive in this environment in the 21st century.

And it gets tougher. We are (13) called to live under the authority structures of this fallen world. The Bible doesn't flinch about this. We have a revolutionary faith, but it's a faith that also calls us to *submit* to worldly authorities. Even if those authorities do evil things.

In this world where you live, there are going to be (15) foolish people who speak ignorantly—and sometimes about *you*, *because* you're not *of* this world. Verse 18, Christians have often been slaves. Slavery has taken different forms in different times and places. But Peter is here to tell you that if you live under even the slightest sort of oppression, their oppression is evil, but you must submit even to harsh masters—not for their sake, but because the Lord is your master.

Peter's advent message to us is that we don't belong to the world. But we do live in it. And our presence in the world is God's will. We will suffer. But if we suffer and still serve the Lord and not ourselves, God will be pleased and glorified.

We are in this together

So we're not of the world. But we *are* in the world.

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The third thing Peter says to get us out of the holiday spirit and into the Holy Spirit; out of the Advent season and into the eager awaiting of an Advent is this:

We are in this together.

Peter calls us (17) to “love the family of believers.”

You are not alone.

You are not the only one exiled, a foreigner under another’s rule

You are not the only one suffering

You are not the only one resisting temptation to sin

You are not the only one who has to hear the ignorant talk of foolish people

You are not the only one wounded and broken

You are not the only one who is prone to wander like a lost sheep

You are not the only one trying to hang on to hope

You are a member of the family of believers! (Aren’t you?)

You are not the only one who is in the world, but not of the world.

You are not the only one hoping in the face of suffering

We are in this *in* Jesus Christ

We are not of the world. We *are* in the world. We are not alone. And finally, Peter’s Advent message to us is: We are in Jesus Christ.

We may be subject to wicked authorities, but we are (16) more fundamentally free. We are under Christ’s reign of grace, which is freedom.

We may go astray. We may be under the authority or influence of those who’ve gone astray like lost sheep. But we are always (25) shepherded and overseen by Jesus Christ.

We may be tempted by the false gods of this world— money, sex, and power— but we are in Jesus Christ. We are (24) dead to sin, and alive in Christ. We are dying to sins, and learning to live for righteousness.

We may suffer, but (23) we are in Jesus Christ, who first suffered for us. We may sin, but we are in Jesus Christ, who (24) bore our sins on the cross.

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We may be insulted and mocked. But we are in Jesus Christ, who (23) endured insults and mockery, but who made no threats, and did not strike back at those who struck him, all for our sake.

Conclusion

Instead of numbing the pain of a year like 2020, Peter tells us to throw out the calendar altogether. Peter’s calendar only has two seasons: A season of hurt and hope, and a season of advent. A season of suffering and sorrow when we walk by faith, and a season of radiant glory that we’ll see with our eyes. Advent for Peter is about our hope in the midst of suffering. Advent for Peter means that we take the surprising, unimaginable, glorious appearing of Jesus that we’ll experience in season two, and we see it with the eyes of faith while we’re carrying our burdens in season one. Sticking a little bit of season two in the middle of season one doesn’t give us “Advent season” or “Christmas season” or “the holiday season.” It gives us *real* hope—the only kind that can actually match our suffering.

Do you want more than your tears?

Do you want more than loneliness?

Do you want more than self-consciousness?

Do you want more than money, sex, and power?

Do you want more than a *lack* of money, sex, and power?

Do you want more than a season of chocolate and candles and gluhwein?

Of course you do. You want, and you *need*, hope, right now, in the midst of your brokenness and suffering.

We can have it.

We can have it when we let the glorious advent of Jesus Christ burst from the future into our present.