

“100% Chance of Clouds”

Rev. Ken McGarry at The First Church in Stoneham, Massachusetts
December 3, 2023 - First Sunday of Advent

[Isaiah 64:1-9; Mark 13:24-37](#)

So as I came to the church this morning, I did so while driving through a foggy bank of clouds. A bit later in the morning, the rain started, and it looks like it's still drizzling and will continue to do so throughout the day. Fortunately, according to The Weather Channel's website, this will be the only day of the whole week ahead on which we will get precipitation. If you're a dry-weather-lover, it looks like Thursday, especially, is your day as the forecast currently shows only a 1% chance of rain. And if you're a cloud-lover, this whole week is your week, as each day, though dry, is expected to be a cloudy one.

There is a 100% chance of clouds this week, but there is a 100% chance of clouds every week, clouds of the figurative kind anyway, as people all around the world face all sorts of difficulties, many of our own making, and it seems like storm clouds are ever on the horizon or are darkening the skies above us.

Thanks be to God, we are not left alone as we deal with life under or in the clouds, for God is with us amidst all the inevitable fog, rain, and storms of life. This is the truth we remember and celebrate on this first Sunday of Advent, as we do each year during this four-week season before Christmas. We focus, at this time, on how, even amidst the clouds and the storms, God is with us, and we cry out O come, O come, Emmanuel, that God would be present with us in new ways now, dispersing more of the gloomy clouds of night and displacing more of the dark shadows with God's perfect light.

In today's gospel lesson from Mark, which will be the first of many from Mark as we have now transitioned to a new liturgical year and most of our gospel readings for the year will be from this book, we heard that “the Son of Man is coming in clouds” at a time when all seems bleak and darkened. Written in the apocalyptic style that was common in the Jewish literature of the day, which followed the older apocalyptic writings of some of Israel's prophets, this image of the Son of Man coming from heaven in clouds riffs off of the book of Daniel in the Hebrew scriptures, which tells of the appearance from heaven of a ruler who will look like

a son of man, or a human, at a time when the world is in turmoil because of the reign of so many empires and their rulers that appear in their destructive ways to be more beastly and monstrous than human. In Daniel, those depicted as beasts are the empires of Babylon, Media, Persia, and Greece. By the time of Jesus, the empire of Rome, through its own destructive force, had come to power in the Near East, and in the New Testament book of Revelation, Rome and its rulers are also depicted as beastly monsters, hell-sent and hell-bent on destroying God's people. But the apocalyptic message of Revelation, of Jesus in the gospels, of Daniel, and of the other prophets of Israel was that the terrible, scary monsters of all the ages do not win and will not continue their terrible reigns forever, but that a ruler would come from God to establish a just realm on earth where there would be peace.

As Christians, we believe that, amidst the beastly reign of the Caesars, Jesus came as the Son of Man, showing us how to live, not as monsters, but as true humans, children of God, made in the Creator's image, living as we were created to live, not by gaining and growing power over others through destruction, but by living in love and so expanding God's realm of peace on earth. And it is our hope that Christ will continue to come to our present stormy and monster-filled world, to ride on the ever-present clouds, to show us anew how to recreate the world as God dreams it should be. It is our Advent desire that more of God's love, joy, peace, and hope would be revealed in our hearts and the world around us. Let us do our Advent task of preparing ourselves to do God's work by letting God rework us, like clay in a potter's hand, into something more useful and beautiful. Let us get ready to give the gifts of our resources to rework the world for the good of all.

This Advent, may more of God's light and life come to our cloudy world as the loving way of Christ reigns over each of us and Christ works through us. Amen.