

## Lessons from the Fig Tree

Advent: Year B, Week 1



The Gospel of Mark for this Sunday puts forth a sequence of events that must take place before we can see the Promised One coming in the clouds with great power and glory. This sequence of events is described in the opening lines of the Gospel as a darkening sun, a dying moon, dwindling stars, and a quaking heaven. Mark offers no enlightenment as to why this uncertainty exists, only that hope will triumph.

Mark goes on to say, *“Take a lesson from the fig tree: as soon as its branches grow tender and its leaves sprout, you know that summer is near. So also, when you see these things happening, you know that the Promised One is near, right at the door.”* (Mark 13:28-29).

If we apply the metaphor of the fig tree to the recent happenings in the Catholic world, it does feel like summer is near. The branches of the church have grown tender and leaves are sprouting! Across the United States, priests, parents, and church workers are creating spiritual programs to build a more inclusive church, including for [Latinx LGBTQ Catholics](#). An increasing number of bishops in [Austria](#) and [Germany](#) continue to endorse church blessings for same gender couples. [Religious congregations](#) are taking the lead to address topics like coming out, dismantling heteronormativity, and dealing with homophobia in their own communities. And, of course, Pope Francis’ [endorsement](#) of same-sex civil unions is nothing short of seismic.

Here in the northern hemisphere, it may feel like winter, but this sequence of events in the Catholic church carries with it all the promises of summer. We still face some uncertainties as we continue our quest for LGBTQ rights, equality and justice, but could these *“happenings”* - *“right at the door”* - truly mean that hope in the Promised One is near?

## SCRIPTURE

Mark 13:24-37

24 "But in those days, after that suffering, the sun will be darkened, the moon will lose its brightness, 25 the stars will fall from the sky and the powers in the heavens will be shaken. 26 Then they will see the Promised One coming in the clouds with great power and glory; 27 then the angels will be sent out to gather the chosen from the four winds, from the ends of the earth to the ends of heaven.

28 "Take a lesson from the fig tree: as soon as its branches grow tender and its leaves sprout, you know that summer is near." 29 So also, when you see these things happening, you know that the Promised One is near, right at the door. 30 Truly, I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all these things take place. 31 Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.

32 "But as for the day or hour, no one knows it - neither the angels in heaven, nor the Only Begotten - no one but Abba God. 33 Be constantly on the watch! Keep awake! You do not know when the appointed time will come. 34 It is like people traveling abroad. They leave their home and put the workers in charge, each with a certain task, and those who watch at the front gate are ordered to stay on the alert. 35 So stay awake! You do not know when the owner of the house is coming, whether at dusk, at midnight, when the rooster crows, or at early dawn. 36 Do not let the owner come suddenly and catch you asleep. 37 What I say to you, I say to all: stay alert!"

**For all the readings for the First Sunday of Advent click [here](#).**

## FOR REFLECTION

1. If you have ever experienced significant change in your life, whether desired or dreaded, you know about "*those days*" described in the Gospel (Mark 13:24) and, in turn, you know about Advent. Given your life experiences as an LGBTQ person or ally, what cryptic clues or messages have you received that point to hope in the Promised One? For what are you staying alert and keeping watch?
2. As an LGBTQ person or ally, how have you weathered the advents of your life when the usual lights that illuminate your path no longer shine? What do you do when your confidence is shaken like stars falling from the heavens? Where do you go when it seems as if darkness is your only companion and God is nowhere to be found?
3. How would you write or tell your LGBTQ advent story? Would the cry of Isaiah, "*O that you would tear open the heavens and come down*" (Isaiah 64:1) reverberate in your writings? How has God restored you over the years?
4. "*My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness*" (2 Corinthians 12:9). In times of weakness how has God's grace been "*sufficient*" for you? Do you embrace "*waiting*" as an act of faithfulness or surrender? Is it a prayer or a problem? In Chapter 64, verse 4, Isaiah writes, "*God works for those who wait for YHWH?*" Do you feel that waiting for God to work has its rewards?

5. How does not knowing the day or hour of Christ's return affect your personal holiness, commitment to gospel initiatives, stewardship, worship, and love for God, neighbor and self? To what specific tasks do you see yourself assigned?
6. As an LGBTQ person/ally, what lessons do you gather from the fig tree this Advent?

## PRAYER

Psalm 80:1-7, 17-19

**Restore us, O God - let your face smile upon us, and we shall be saved!**

Shepherd of Israel, hear us - You who lead Joseph like a flock;  
You who are enthroned on the cherubim, shine forth!  
2 Shine forth before Ephraim, Benjamin, and  
Manasseh!  
Awaken your power and come and save us!

**3 Restore us, O God - let your face smile upon us,  
and we shall be saved!**

4 God of Hosts, how much longer will you fume while  
your people pray?  
5 You fed us on the bread of tears,  
And made us drink our tears in such measure.  
6 You let our neighbors ridicule us, and our enemies  
treat us with scorn.

**7 Restore us, O God - let your face smile upon us  
and we shall be saved!**

17 Let your hand rest upon the One at your right side,  
the Chosen One you raised up for yourself.  
18 Then we will never turn from you again;  
our life renewed, we will invoke your Name.

**19 Restore us, O God - let your face smile upon us, and we shall be saved!**

