

Advent Study: Road Trip

Week #1

Introduction

This week we begin a four-week journey of Advent called Road Trip. What is Advent? I'm glad you asked! Have you ever eagerly awaited something, counting down the days, preparing, and getting more excited as the time approaches? That's the spirit of Advent!

It's the time leading up to Christmas where we eagerly wait and prepare our hearts for the celebration of Jesus' birth. It's about anticipating the joy, hope, and love that Jesus brings into our world. During this season that is often filled with the nostalgia of Christmases past, we often find ourselves traveling to spend time with family and friends; our vehicles packed to the brim. There's an air of chaos, but you can't deny the excitement.

Does that sound familiar? Have you ever taken a trip like this?

In our text for this week, Mark 13:24-37, Jesus paints a vivid picture for his disciples of massive, earth-shattering changes that were on the horizon. He urges us to be vigilant and prepared, much like how we ensure we have everything we need for a long journey.

As we pull out of the driveway to embark on our Advent Road Trip, let's remind ourselves to be alert, anchored in the hope and promise of Jesus' arrival. Are you Packed and Ready, for the unpredictable but exhilarating journey ahead? Let's join in this spiritual journey together!

Illustration Video

<https://youtu.be/ozksR8QLWzM?si=fEnQaUhftdmN5ei2&t=5>

Note: Link is set so that the video starts several seconds late to avoid a gesture that some viewers may find objectionable.

Video Discussion Questions

1. This clip is from the movie National Lampoon's Christmas Vacation (1989), showing a journey the Griswold family takes to find a Christmas tree. As you can see, this journey doesn't go as planned. In what ways did the journey go awry? What caused this?
2. Have you ever had a journey make an unexpected turn? What caused this?
3. At one point, the car swerves under the bed of a long truck, obscuring everything including the view of the road! Have you ever felt as though your view has been obscured by some circumstance? Can you

share about this? What did you do to regain your view? Did you have to choose a new perspective? Explain...

4. At one point, Ellen (the mom sitting in the front seat) begins to pray. It seems like she does this out of exasperation. Have you ever prayed out of exasperation? What did you expect to happen? What *actually* happened?

Scripture: Mark 13:24-37 (CEB)

“In those days, after the suffering of that time, the sun will become dark, and the moon won’t give its light. The stars will fall from the sky, and the planets and other heavenly bodies will be shaken. Then they will see the Human One coming in the clouds with great power and splendor. Then he will send the angels and gather together his chosen people from the four corners of the earth, from the end of the earth to the end of heaven.

“Learn this parable from the fig tree. After its branch becomes tender and it sprouts new leaves, you know that summer is near. In the same way, when you see these things happening, you know that he’s near, at the door. I assure you that this generation won’t pass away until all these things happen. Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will certainly not pass away.

“But nobody knows when that day or hour will come, not the angels in heaven and not the Son. Only the Father knows. Watch out! Stay alert! You don’t know when the time is coming. It is as if someone took a trip, left the household behind, and put the servants in charge, giving each one a job to do, and told the doorkeeper to stay alert. Therefore, stay alert! You don’t know when the head of the household will come, whether in the evening or at midnight, or when the rooster crows in the early morning or at daybreak. Don’t let him show up when you weren’t expecting and find you sleeping. What I say to you, I say to all: Stay alert!”

Scripture Discussion Questions

1. Our Revised Common Lectionary (RCL) puts this Mark text together with Isaiah 64:1-9. Both use dramatic imagery concerning the coming or presence of God: the heavens torn open, quaking mountains and boiling hot water (both in Isaiah), total darkness and stars falling from heaven. Describe how you can (or cannot) relate to this imagery. How do you sense the presence of God in your life? Do you usually sense the presence of God in the ways you *expect* to sense God?
2. The Gospel text speaks about watchfulness, especially since no one knows the specific time of the return of Christ. Christians generally believe that Jesus will return some day. Do you believe this could occur in your lifetime? Either way, what is the import of the command to watchfulness? What do you watch for? Understanding that Advent is about preparing for Christ’s *incarnation* in the world, what do you get ready during Advent?
3. In verse 31, Jesus says, “Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will certainly not pass away.” What are the most compelling Gospel stories or messages that for you will never pass away? How do

those stories or messages guide and shape you? What sometimes distracts you, and how do you get back on track?

More Questions Framed Differently

1. What signs do the scriptures imagine will indicate God's coming into the world?
2. What signs does our culture use or display to let everyone know the Christmas season is here? Are any of them borrowed or modified from scripture?
3. What feelings or thoughts do these signs evoke?
4. How are the cultural signs for Christmas and the signs that scripture uses to indicate God's coming into the world similar and different?
5. What does the Mark passage say about paying attention?
6. What signs of the Advent/Christmas season do you notice every day?
7. What signs of God's presence do you notice every day?
8. Tell about a time when your experience of God was unexpected or caught you off guard.
9. How might we be more mindful of God's presence with us each day?

Weekly Action

Consider something you're waiting for this week. Maybe it's a package that's been ordered, maybe it's news of travel plans, maybe it's part of a project to be completed before you can work, maybe it's a Christmas tree! Pay attention to *how* you wait. Notice your emotions, how you react to those emotions. Make a note of all this on a piece of paper or on a digital device.

Come back to your note a day or two after you write it and add anything that might be necessary. Then, with that note in hand, pray however you feel led, related to what's written. Before you conclude your prayer, take time to listen for God. Add to your note what you may have heard or felt during that time of listening. Then take action!

Prayer

God of the heavens and in our hearts, in this season of anticipation, guide our hearts as we prepare for the coming of your son. Amidst the chaos and distractions, keep our focus on the true meaning of our journey. Lord, as we reflect on your word, fill our hearts with hope and readiness. Grant us patience as we wait, and wisdom to recognize your presence along the way. Help us stay the course, ever eager to celebrate the gift of Jesus, our guiding star on this Advent road trip. In Jesus' name, we pray, Amen.