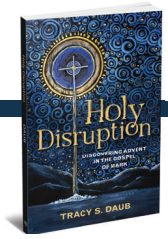
Holy Disruption Sermon Series

GUIDE FOR PREACHERS

Preaching *Holy Disruption* as an Advent sermon series in conjunction with small groups studying the book and individuals following the Daily Reading Guide provides a cohesive experience for the congregation to see Advent in a new way. The Gospel of Mark's lack of a birth narrative makes clear the significance of Emmanuel's incarnation beyond birth to Jesus' whole life, death, and beyond.

Let each chapter inspire your sermon-writing process. Daub's examples, organization and flow, and way of connecting this non-traditional approach with the Advent experience may complement your own preaching style well or simply spark your own creative process.

This guide suggests one focus Scripture from Mark, though the book includes several alternatives or you might select a different one altogether. A few bullet points for each sermon offer main points to consider about the text, topic, and audience as you prepare your sermon.



FIRST SUNDAY OF ADVENT

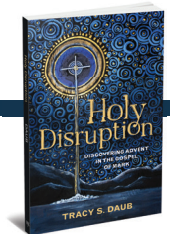
The End of the World as We Know It

Suggested Focus Scripture

Mark 13:1–13, 21–37

Book References: Introduction and Chapter One

- Introduce the series with insights from the book's introduction (see page 6 for an overview of each chapter/sermon). Daub explains how there is no birth narrative in Mark's gospel, but that Mark could be seen as using Jesus' baptism as his origin story, or that Mark may have "considered his entire Gospel to be Jesus' 'beginning' story," given verse 1:1 (p. 4).
- Remind congregants that while we often think of Advent only in terms of Jesus' first coming (birth), the season of Advent traditionally recalls the "already and not yet" nature of living in the time between Christ's first and second comings.
- The "Little Apocalypse" of Mark 13 can be disturbing to our modern ears. Be aware that some in your congregation may have been steeped in End Times preaching and writing like that of Harold Camping or the Left Behind series. Remind congregants that most ideas about Jesus' second coming are conjecture with little basis in Scripture, and that Jesus warned his disciples about trying to discern the timing or details of his return.
- The idea of the world ending is more frightening for people living relatively comfortable lives, but for first century Jews, oppressed by the powerful and comfortable Romans, the idea of God's intervention would be hoped-for good news. Help congregants feel that hope by reflecting on the "little apocalypses" we all experience—illness and injury, grief and loss—as well all the injustice in the world waiting to be made right.
- Reflecting on both the first and second comings, conclude by reminding congregants that just as Jesus' birth was not as one might have expected, his second will also defy expectations. Our task is to honor the Jesus we've met by righting wrongs in the world however we can before God brings everything to fruition.



SECOND SUNDAY OF ADVENT

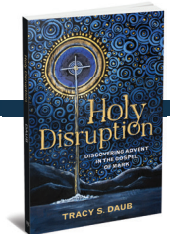
Peace on Earth, Goodwill to All

Suggested Focus Scripture

Mark 8:31–38

Book References: Chapter Two

- Many people can resonate with the idea that the cheery sentiments of the holiday season belie a more complicated reality of stress and even deep sorrow. Honor this reality and remind people who are grieving or struggling with depression that they are not alone.
- Consider outlining different aspects and purposes of "faux peace": masking our pain and putting on a happy face, deluding ourselves because "we would rather accept a comforting lie than an uncomfortable truth" (p. 39), and even more deceptive efforts to distract people from injustice.
- With its depiction of Jesus as disruptor, Mark emphasizes how the path to true peace often doesn't feel very peaceful. More than just the absence of violence, biblical shalom means well-being for all, a peace "not possible where there [is] hunger or neglect, great disparities of wealth, or indifference to human suffering," and which may require conflict and opposition to forces that inhibit that well-being.
- Some congregations rarely mention the figure of Satan; it may be helpful to point out that Satan literally means "adversary" (see p. 42) and that Jesus provides us a model for resisting the adverse forces that oppose true peace both internally and in our societies.
- In Mark 8:31–38, Jesus rebukes Peter (even calling him "Satan") for suggesting that Jesus should not suffer and die. While many of us resist the idea of conflict, confrontation, or even mere discomfort, Daub points out that these may be the crosses Jesus tells his followers that they must take up. Niceness and neutrality might be the life we must lay down to pursue the radical peace that Jesus was born to bring the world.



THIRD SUNDAY OF ADVENT

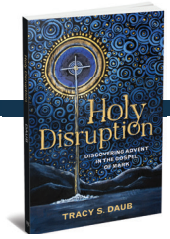
Home for the Holidays

Suggested Focus Scripture

Mark 3:31–35

Book References: Chapter Three

- Once again, we begin by acknowledging the disparity between the feel-good Christmas image of going or being "home for the holidays" and the anxiety or grief many people feel at the prospect of gathering with their families of origin (or, on a smaller scale, feeling pressure about preparing to host anyone at all).
- While exploring the challenges of engaging difficult relationships when one goes "home," you may also engage with existential longings like the need to belong, to be loved, to be accepted, or (sometimes most challenging) to accept oneself. Likewise, you can consider the plight of those without homes—due to homelessness, eviction, refugee status, or being part of a diaspora community far from a beloved ancestral homeland.
- Providing the biblical context for Jesus' life and Mark's writing, highlight the history of exile and Roman occupation that complicated the Jewish people's sense of home. Pairing this with John 1:14's language of "pitching a tent among us" (see p. 75) introduces the idea of God bringing "home" to us. In God's kingdom, everyone finds belonging and family.
- In Mark 3:31–35 (as in John 19:25–29) Jesus emphasizes that familial relationships do not have to be defined by biology. Many people today have found that a "chosen family" of friends and surrogates embody the love of God's kingdom more than their families of origin do. For those who can't go or dread going home for the holidays, we have a model for seeking home and family elsewhere, and those of us with room around our table can embody God's kingdom by helping ensure everyone has a place where they belong.



FOURTH SUNDAY OF ADVENT

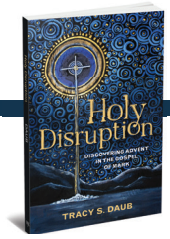
Hidden in Plain Sight

Suggested Focus Scripture

Mark 9:2–10

Book References: Chapter Four

- Reminding congregants why it is strange to focus an Advent series on Mark, explain that Mark's gospel is also unique in its use of what scholars call "the messianic secret"—Jesus' warning to "tell no one" about his identity or his miraculous works. Some theorize that the purpose of this refrain is so that the revelation of the secret can come at the proper time.
- This interplay of keeping and revealing secrets sets the preacher up well for stories of Christmas morning surprises that were either successful or went awry, with the goal of emphasizing the importance of revealing the secret at the right time. (Note that some families, in an effort to prevent child abuse, teach their children that surprises are ok but secrets are not. The emphasis on revelation is the same: we keep secrets for a specified time, not indefinitely for the purpose of deceit or harm.)
- This sermon presents an opportunity to extol the value of mystery. As Daub says, "it would seem a lot easier to follow Jesus and his way if he were as apparent as the billboards we pass on our highways. Yet it is also possible that Christ's concealment actually enriches our faith" (p. 107).
- Jesus offered hints about his identity in his parables, cluing the people in that God's kingdom would not come the way they expected, but rather through the inversion of expectations. God will appear in a way you least expect, he told them, but meanwhile he showed them through his actions. Even today, we can find Jesus in forms we don't expect. (Reference Matthew 25:31–46.)
- These parables are surely not the first indicator of this great inversion, though Mark does not reference the humble circumstances of Jesus' birth. The messianic secret was evident from the very beginning of Jesus' story as told in other gospels, for who would have expected the savior of the world, one who would reign forever and ever, to be born to unwed parents from a backwater town, with nowhere to lay their child but a manger?

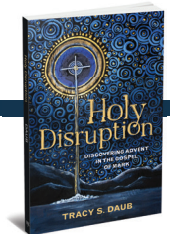


CHRISTMAS EVE OR CHRISTMAS DAY

The Cradle, the Cross, and the Gift of Emmanuel

Suggested Focus Scripture

Mark 15:33–39

Book References: Chapter Five

- Knowing that Christmas Eve services will likely be attended by many visitors who have not been present for the preceding weeks' sermons or small-group study sessions, you may wish to use chapter five primarily for Christmas Day (which falls on a Sunday in 2022) or the first Sunday after Christmas.
- If you are keeping "Holy Disruption" as your theme for Christmas Eve services, consider preaching more generally on the disruptive nature of Christ's emergence into our world. You will likely want to include traditional Christmas Eve readings from Luke and/or Matthew, but consider also including a text like Mark 15:33–39 to demonstrate the declaration of Jesus' identity and summarize the power of Mark's nativity-less telling of Emmanuel's story.
- Preaching "The Cradle, the Cross, and the Gift of Emmanuel" on Christmas Day or the following Sunday can be a perfect segue into the new year and preaching the story of Jesus as a cohesive saga from birth to death and eternal reign.
- The three instances in which Jesus is called "Son of God" in Mark's gospel (at baptism, Transfiguration, and at his crucifixion) provide an excellent framework around which to build this sermon celebrating the ultimate significance of the baby in the manger. The last of these declarations (the centurion's proclamation in Mark 15:39) in particular offers a simplicity well-suited for a Christmas message: rather than a fully developed theology of the cross, Mark simply, in Daub's words, "takes us by the hand, leads us to the cross, and points, saying 'There. There is God.'" (p. 121).
- The cross is surely a less palatable image than the cradle, but in pairing these images we see how the coming of Emmanuel at Bethlehem means not only that God is with us in joyous times (not to downplay the hardship of Mary and Joseph's experience) but in the times of greatest sorrow, pain, and brokenness. From the cradle to the cross and beyond to now and forever, God is with us.