

Sermon

“Keep Awake”

A Sermon for First Presbyterian Church

Sunday, December 1, 2019

First Sunday in Advent

Is. 2:1 The word that Isaiah son of Amoz saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem.

*Is. 2:2 In days to come
the mountain of the LORD'S house
shall be established as the highest of the mountains,
and shall be raised above the hills;
all the nations shall stream to it.*

*3 Many peoples shall come and say,
“Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD,
to the house of the God of Jacob;
that he may teach us his ways
and that we may walk in his paths.”
For out of Zion shall go forth instruction,
and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem.*

*4 He shall judge between the nations,
and shall arbitrate for many peoples;
they shall beat their swords into plowshares,
and their spears into pruning hooks;
nation shall not lift up sword against nation,
neither shall they learn war any more.*

*Is. 2:5 O house of Jacob,
come, let us walk
in the light of the LORD!*

Rom. 13:11 Besides this, you know what time it is, how it is now the moment for you to wake from sleep. For salvation is nearer to us now than when we became believers; 12 the night is far gone, the day is near. Let us then lay aside the works of darkness and put on the armor of light; 13 let us live honorably as in the day, not in reveling and drunkenness, not in debauchery

and licentiousness, not in quarreling and jealousy. 14 Instead, put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires.

- I. When Paul writes to the Roman church he urges them to be alert to the possibility that Jesus might return any day.**
 - A. It is a consistent theme in Paul that the time is near and we must be ready.**
 - B. Indeed, Jesus too, admonished us to keep our lamps trimmed and burning and filled with oil so that we would be ready [Matt 25:1-12]**
 - C. Paul was so effective at communicating the urgency of being ready for Christ's imminent return that followers in Thessalonica became deeply concerned when some of them passed away prior to Christ's return. The first letter to the Thessalonians assured them that everything would be fine. [1 Thessalonians 5:1-11]**
 - D. Now, roughly 2000 years later, we might say that:**
 - 1. While the early church may not have understood the timing . . .**
 - 2. They got the ethical implications of the return of Christ just right.**
 - 3. Whether Jesus comes again today, tomorrow, or 2000 years from now — we are meant to live in ongoing anticipation of the coming kingdom of heaven.**

- II. It can be difficult to remain alert to the possibility of Christ's return . . .**

- A. Any time we are asked to wait and watch this is true —**
 - 1. Mike and I waiting for Sunset to be born...**
- B. But there are ways to maintain our vigilance:**
 - 1. Worshipping each Lord's Day**
 - 2. Spending daily time in devotion or prayer**
 - 3. Really embrace and use the tool of the liturgical calendar (seasons of intense preparation)**
 - 4. Giving a tithe — where our treasure is - there will our heart be.**
 - 5. Renewal of our baptismal vows**
 - 6. Coming to the Lord's Table regularly**
- C. All these along with opportunities for Bible study, fellowship, missional ministry, and more are meant to keep us awake to the possibility of the arrival of the kingdom of heaven.**

III. We remain awake so that we can wait/watch for Christ

- A. “Obviously, we know when Christmas will arrive and what it will be like when it does. We know the script, and all we need do is follow it. But waiting for Christ to come—or to come again—requires something more, an expectant watchfulness, because we never know when he will appear.”**

Feasting on the Word: Preaching the Revised Common Lectionary - Feasting on the Word – Year B, Volume 1: Advent through Transfiguration.

- B. We can look for God in all the usual, well-lit places — but we will find [Christ] in all the world’s most unlikely places. (Christine Kane sentiment)**
- C. See there is a way that we can remain awake to all of the pressures and activities of the world — and asleep to all of the subtle ways that God is trying to reach us.**
 - 1. Be alert - anticipate that God *is present* and *will speak* if only we will attune the ear of our heart to listen.**
- D. Many of us have the additional burden of our affluence which can dull our awareness of the in-breaking kingdom of God.**

“No one can celebrate a genuine Christmas without being truly poor.

The self-sufficient, the proud, those who, because they have everything, look down on others, those who have no need of God—for them there will be no Christmas.

Only the poor, the hungry, those who need someone to come on their behalf, will have that someone. That someone is God, Emmanuel, God-with-us.

Without poverty of spirit there can be no abundance of God.”

[Oscar Romero — from a homily delivered Christmas-eve 1978]

- IV. Advent as a time to begin again (a new year in liturgical terms)**
 - A. When we awake we begin again with the new day**
 - B. So Advent invites us to begin anew**
 - 1. To prepare for the Coming of Christ**

2. Even as we look for him in the present.

C. So come to the Table:

1. Come as those who know that:

now [is] the moment for you to wake from sleep. For salvation is nearer to us now than when we became believers; 12 the night is far gone, the day is near. Let us then lay aside the works of darkness and put on the armor of light; 13 let us live honorably as in the day, ... [putting] on the Lord Jesus Christ.