

Sunday, November 27, 2020

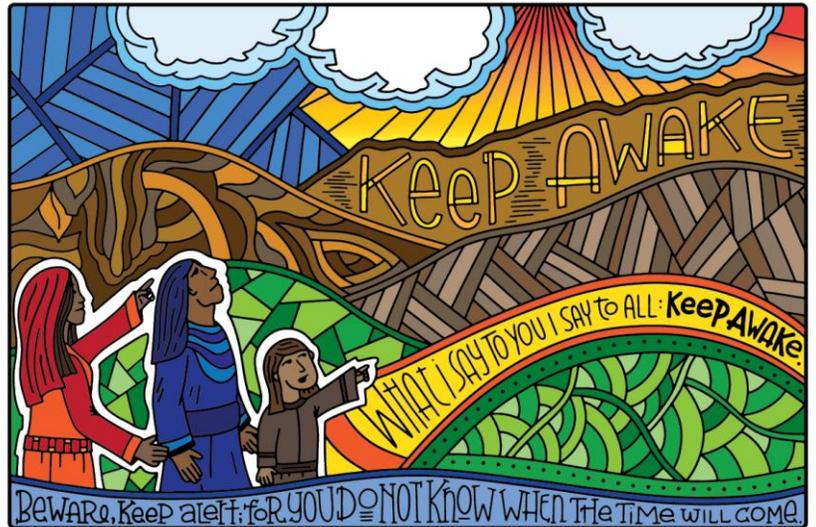
Sermon: "Advent & Apocalyptic Hope: God Is Not Out To Get You. God Is Love."

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Today is the first Sunday of Advent. Advent means "Coming." Amy Brinkley will light the Advent Candle of Hope. Advent is a time of preparing ourselves for the coming of Christ at Christmas and for the coming of God every moment of our lives. Everyone is invited. You are loved just as you are and just as you are becoming.

Friends, when I was in college I had a dear friend who had a poster up in his room that I absolutely hated. It was a poster that said, "Stay Awake, Jesus is Coming" and I hated that poster for two reasons. First, I love to sleep. I've always loved to sleep. At about nine o'clock p.m. I'm good for nothing. I can't do anything except go to bed and sleep. The other



reason that I didn't like that poster is because it created in me a lot of spiritual anxiety.

As Heather Heath read the scripture passage today (Mark 13: 32-37), maybe you felt some anxiety too. Because when I read that poster and when I read the passages today that say, "Stay Awake," it's as if there is an "or else" at the end of that message. Stay awake, or else God's gonna get you! Stay awake, because Jesus is coming back and if you're not awake, Jesus will be out to get you. So stay awake! And I wonder if that is something that you heard during this passage.

Maybe it's just me, hopefully it's just me, because I think if we're reading that passage and hearing a threat behind it, that we've missed the point. Because Christianity that increases our anxiety level, that comes to us as a threat, is not a Christianity or a spirituality that I think is worth living. I would rather we be atheists than to have that kind of spirituality. Here is what I mean. Jesus is not out to get you. When Jesus comes again in the second coming, Jesus will come again just like Jesus came in his first coming. Jesus does not change. Jesus is not out to get anyone unless you say, "Jesus is out to love us and to invite us to love one another." And here is how I want to put that before you in this scripture passage today.

The necessity of watchfulness. Jesus says, "Stay awake, wake up," or as we might say today "get woke" to the presence of Jesus who is already among us. And where do we find Jesus today? In the same places that we found Jesus before. Jesus says these very interesting words, he says, "Therefore, keep awake for you do not know when the master of the house will come, in the evening, or at midnight, or at cockcrow, or at dawn." And this is key to understanding these four words –

evening, midnight, cockroach, and dawn. Why is this key? Because this happens in Mark Chapter 13. In the very next chapter, Mark Chapter 14, we see when Jesus comes at midnight, at evening, cockroach, and dawn. And what happens during those hours? When Jesus comes in the evening, he breaks bread with his disciples. Are you able to see Jesus when we break bread with one another? What does Jesus do on this evening – we call it the Last Supper, or the Lord's Supper – Jesus is seen in the one who comes to us, as the one who hands himself over to us, and says, “What are you going to do with my body? I give you my body. What will you do with it? Will you love it? Will you be with me no matter what happens? What will you do?” That's when God comes to us in Jesus in the evening. And then in Mark 14, Jesus comes at midnight in the Garden of Gethsemane. In the garden is where Jesus comes to us, as one who prays, who knows that he is about to be betrayed and abandoned to the cross. And he prays as one who is distressed. And Jesus says to Peter, his closest disciple, “You couldn't stay awake.” You couldn't “stay woke” to the presence of God with you here at midnight, not the one who is out to get you, but the one who gives himself over in an act of non-violent love to us.

His friends fall asleep and then Jesus is captured. A few hours later, Jesus is in the courtyard and Peter follows him. Peter promises that he will be with him to the very end and then people come to Peter and say, “You're with him, aren't you.” Peter says no. And what happens next? The cock crows. Then a few hours later at dawn, Jesus comes as one who is delivered over to the religious and political elite and they end up putting Jesus on the cross. You see, when Jesus sets up in Mark Chapter 13, he is setting us up for Mark Chapter 14 with Jesus comes to us in the evening do you have eyes to see Jesus, who gives himself to us for spiritual and physical nourishment? Do you see Jesus, who comes to us at midnight? When he prays in fear and trembling because he knows that bad things are about to happen to him. Do you see Jesus, are your eyes opened at cockcrow when Jesus is about to be handed over to those who will kill him? Are your eyes open at dawn when Jesus goes to the cross? Can we see God's presence among us? Not in the one that we thought was powerful, who would use violence in order to protect himself and his friends, but in the non-violent one who hands himself over in an act of self-giving love and says, “Please, no more violence.” Someone who would rather have violence inflicted upon him as opposed to inflicting violence upon someone else. That is what God is like. That is what Jesus reveals God is like to us.

For so long we thought God was the violent one who was out to get us if we didn't do the right things, or if we didn't have the right amount of faith. But in these passages, at evening, at midnight, at cockcrow, and dawn, the disciples don't have faith. They're not “woke.” And how does Jesus respond to them? He doesn't abandon them. He doesn't betray them. He gives them mercy. He gives them grace.

I have a dear friend, a Catholic, gay, theologian named James Allison. He says that this is one of the fundamental points of Christianity. The disciples do it wrong over and over again. They fail to stay awake. And how does Jesus respond? The same way Jesus responds at his second coming – mercy and forgiveness and love. You see, Christianity is not for people who need to be right all the time. It is not for spiritual all-stars who get it right. It's for people like you. It's for people like me who frequently get it wrong, who frequently fall asleep, and God comes to us and says let's try it again, let's try to stay woke one more time, because Jesus comes to us not just at Christmas, not just at the second

coming, but Jesus comes to us as we saw last week in Matthew Chapter 25, in the vulnerable, in those who have pre-existing conditions. Jesus comes to us in those who need healthcare, in those who are vulnerable because they have a black body and they might get shot. Jesus comes to us in those who are suffering from economic hardships because of Covid-19 and need help from our government. Jesus comes to us in those who are vulnerable and Jesus says to us, “Wake up, see me in them, see me in one another.”

Friends, may we continue to “wake up” when we fall asleep to the presence of God among us. May we continue to move forward in this Advent season as we prepare to see the Christ figure not in a powerful, violent king, but in a baby whose parents are so poor that all they can do is have this birth in a manger among animals. And may we see Christ present among us already in one another. Amen