

First Sunday Of Advent

November 29, 2020

Sermon by Rev. Zachary W. Johnson

Hill Avenue Grace Lutheran Church

Pasadena, California

Gospel: Mark 13:24-37

[Jesus said:] ²⁴“In those days, after that suffering, the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, ²⁵and the stars will be falling from heaven, and the powers in the heavens will be shaken. ²⁶Then they will see ‘the Son of Man coming in clouds’ with great power and glory. ²⁷Then he will send out the angels, and gather his elect from the four winds, from the ends of the earth to the ends of heaven.

²⁸“From the fig tree learn its lesson: as soon as its branch becomes tender and puts forth its leaves, you know that summer is near. ²⁹So also, when you see these things taking place, you know that he is near, at the very gates. ³⁰Truly I tell you, this generation will not pass away until all these things have taken place. ³¹Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away. ³²“But about that day or hour no one knows, neither the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. ³³Beware, keep alert; for you do not know when the time will come. ³⁴It is like a man going on a journey, when he leaves home and puts his slaves in charge, each with his work, and commands the doorkeeper to be on the watch. ³⁵Therefore, 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, ³⁶or else he may find you asleep when he comes suddenly. ³⁷And what I say to you I say to all: Keep awake.”

SERMON by Pastor Zachary Johnson

Advent is the season of hopeful expectation. It is a time where we prepare ourselves to once again welcome the Word made flesh, while we continue to wait for God’s kingdom to become fully realized in the broken world. And so Jesus reminds us in our gospel lesson today to keep awake and to watch vigilantly for the day of the Lord’s coming.

There is something that is about to happen that Jesus wants the disciples to pay attention to. God is about to do something unexpected, and something that will turn the world upside down. Unfortunately, the disciples fall asleep while they are in the garden and Jesus is awaiting his arrest.

To be awake and alert as Christians is to be continually ready to see Jesus, to hear Jesus, to recognize Jesus when he calls to us to take action. Jesus is the Word incarnate; the Word that has taken on flesh; therefore, Jesus will often show up in the cries of others—the cries of the poor, the cries of those fighting for justice, the cries of those feeling lost or forgotten, the cries of those who are suffering; the cries of those begging for forgiveness.



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The season of Advent is a reminder to us that, when God and the world become so intimately tied together through the birth of Christ, we can hopefully expect God to show up in the people and places of the world that are in need of resurrection. Therefore, it is up to us to remain awake and alert to where God shows up, for God chooses to use us as the hands and feet of love, grace, and mercy in the world.

To remain asleep, however, is to allow the enemy to come like a thief in the night that breaks in and steals all that is dear to us. It is to allow the enemy to sow discord and division among us. It is to allow the enemy to influence our actions with fear or false promises of earthly glories such as wealth and popularity.

The broken world has yet to come to fully realize the freedom and the good news of the incarnation, the cross, and the resurrection. The world, as we witness almost every day, is very susceptible to the powers and lures of the evil one. It needs someone to keep watch; to keep watch for those who cry out in suffering because the evil one has struck again.

Thankfully, Advent reminds us that God does not remain passive in fighting for the souls of all people and the whole of creation. As the days grow shorter, as the night becomes longer, God takes this time to remind us of the beacon of hope that shines in the darkness and the darkness does not overcome it. God uses the season of Advent to prepare us for action by alerting us to the fact that God is doing something new once again. God uses the season of Advent to remind us that we are free to respond to the cries of the world, because we never respond by ourselves but with Immanuel.

Of course, what is really good news is the fact that, because of God's actions so long ago, we do have the gift of Immanuel who will show us the way. We are free to keep awake and be alert because Jesus is forever with us. Jesus continually shows us love, grace, mercy, and forgiveness so that our hearts are transformed to be loving and compassionate towards others. This love will point others to the Light of the world.

When I was a young lad, living in Ocean Shores, WA, I would sit on our living room couch and excitedly wait while keeping watch out the window for my grandparents to arrive. Nothing could draw me away from that window as I watched and waited. I loved my grandparents very much, and I was always excited when they came to visit my family and me. I wanted to be the first person to greet them and welcome them to our home.

It is with that same joyous expectation and watchfulness that we enter into another season of Advent, a season to celebrate that God has indeed done the unthinkable in becoming one of us, forever binding the relationship between heaven and earth. But it is also a season where we can once again joyously watch for the coming of the Lord, so that we can remain hopeful that the promise of resurrection continues to reconcile us and all of creation.

Amen.



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