

Advent 1A: Living Each Day In Readiness For God Coming

Introduction: Sometimes We Forget What We're About

“Keep awake therefore, for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming.”

A ninety-two year old man played the lottery once a week for decades;

Never winning too very much, but for years hoping and dreaming

That one day he would be the prize winner and take up a new life;

The life he had always wanted to live, with all the things that money could buy;

And all the opportunities to help those in need.

When he was ninety, his children helped him to leave the family home;

And live in a retirement community;

When he gave up his car, one of his kids would take him out once a week;

And the trip always included buying a lottery ticket.

One week he left the ticket in the car when he got back to his home;

And the daughter noticed it a few days later;

For grins she decided to see if he had somehow won the big prize;

He had. He had won forty million dollars.

The family talked about this great windfall and wondered what it would do to their father;

Afraid the news might cause him to have a heart attack;

So they called their priest, explained the situation and asked her for help;

They decided that their priest might be just the right person to share the news;

And she went over to visit their father.

They caught up on one another's life, the goings on at church, his friends and family;

Finally, the priest got around to asking him what he would do if he ever won the lottery;

Say, forty million dollars and how that might change his life.

The old man smiled and thought for a moment and responded,
It wouldn't change my life in the least;
I'm 92 years old for goodness sake and like my life here;
My children and grandchildren are all living full lives;
I'd probably give it all to the church.
And with that, the priest had a heart attack and was rushed to the hospital.

And that's what's wrong with many of us today in so many areas of our lives;
Many of us have quit watching; we've stopped looking forward, hoping for more;
The old man quit watching for the surprise he'd always hoped for
As he kept spending money on lottery tickets;
And the priest stopped watching for God's surprising gifts.

And there are times in our lives when you and I have quit watching, too;
Rather than living our lives on tip toe, in an atmosphere of expectation;
We often find ourselves drowning in a feeling of ho hum and more of the same;
Some of us can even drift into an air of pessimism and fear;
Devout Christians can be prone to operate out of a sense of fear rather than faith;
That may be why many Christians and too many churches are faltering today;
We're afraid; we've stopped watching with Godly expectation;
And we have far less faith than we could have.

How different many of us have become by comparison to those earliest followers of Jesus;
It was far more difficult for them to live in hope as Christians in the world than it is for us;
There were only a handful of them against the staggering might of the Roman Empire;
But they believed that God was with them and working among them;
They believed and lived in the hope and expectation that He would come again
To judge and to restore all things in heaven and earth.

We followers of Jesus are called to live our lives as though what we are doing matters;
Invited to live each day, each moment in the hope that Christ will come again;
That Christ will come into our lives today as individuals and as this community;
And one day in a second coming that will be so magnificent;
So awe inspiring and world changing that we can be freed
To live as people who are awake and watching
And facing each day, each moment in hope.

The Advent of Christ

“Keep awake therefore, for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming.”
On this first Sunday in Advent, this first Sunday of a new Church year, we begin with the end;
We begin with talk of Christ coming again in all His glory.

It would make more sense for us to be talking about beginnings of the earth, about creation;
Or since Christmas is less than a month away we could be reading stories
That lead up to the moment of Jesus’ birth that first Christmas;
The annunciations to Mary and to Joseph or the long road to Bethlehem.

I have a very dear friend who is a priest in Asheville, NC who actually changed the readings
For Advent so that it would reflect the season as it has become;
And each Sunday is a gentle march toward Bethlehem and Christmas;
His reasoning is sound in the sense that the culture around us
Is already so wired for Christmas that we might have a better opportunity to touch people;
If we gave into the current culture and re-Christianized what they think of as this holiday season.

But the season of Advent, the start of the new Church year always begins with talk of the end;
With talk of Christ’s coming again to remind us to watch and to look forward in hope;
So that we’re not only looking backward to Christ’s first coming at Christmas;
But also to something even greater than His first visit among us.

This talk of the second coming in Advent is intended to jolt us and wake us into looking forward
But often conjures up some strange views;
Some misunderstandings about when Christ will come again and how He will come.

Faithful Christian people have misled time and again by leaders and groups;
Who have announced dates for Jesus coming and been a source of great disappointment;
The biggest recorded disappointment was in the year 1,000;
When Christian all over the world set aside their lives;
Thinking the end was coming, but it hadn't come yet.

And for years, we've been seeing bumper stickers and now magnets on cars;
Based on a particular reading of some of Jesus' words this morning;
About how two working in the field or two women grinding grain together;
And how one of the two will be taken and the other left behind.

The bumper stickers and magnets say something to the effect that in case of rapture;
In case of Jesus' second coming, drive carefully because this car will be unoccupied;
So sure are they of how the end will be and that they have been chosen;
Or the other sticker that suit my sometimes strange sense of humor that say,
In case of the rapture, can I have your care?

I chuckle at the slightly misunderstood confidence in God's plan and the promise of return;
But I'm convinced that Jesus' sayings this morning and in other places;
Have less to do with the how and when and more with the promise and the hope.
The truth that we can count on and hope for in this Sunday's Gospel and the start of Advent
Are not the details of His coming again, but the promise that He is coming;
And that our lives can be lived in a waking hope and confidence
Of Christ with us now and Christ with us in a greater world that's coming.

Keeping Awake

“Keep awake therefore, for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming.”

Keeping awake for Jesus’ coming again;

Means that you and I can approach each day, each part of our lives;

With a deep sense of hope and expectation.

It means that how we pay attention to God in our lives has a real purpose and effect;

It means that how we live and treat and love others matters;

It means that in dull spiritual moments and in dark moments and struggles

There is a hope beyond our meager hope that allows us to press on;

It means that whether we sense it or not, God’s grace and presence

Are breaking into our lives and the life of the world more and more and more

And that one day, we will be drawn into the fullness of life with God and one another.

And so we live in hope.

One of my favorite Christian authors and story tellers, Max Lucado,

Tells a story about being ready and keeping awake until the Lord returns;

And reminds me that what we do and how we live in hope matters.

It seems there was a large ship that was caught in a hurricane with many other ships;

Somehow the captain guided the large ship through the storm;

Even as ships all around them were floundering and sinking;

He found a safe harbor next to a large island;

And left most of the crew in safety there.

He told them to build a large bonfire and to keep it burning;

To keep it burning as a reminder to them that they were safe;

And as a signal for others ships and sailors that they could find safety there as well.

He asked them to feed the fire and keep it burning until he returned;

Because the captain and a smaller crew were going back out to rescue others;

As the ship turned back into the roaring waves, the captain turned back

And saw with great satisfaction that the fire had been lit.

But after a few days, the sailors on the land began to wonder if the captain would return;

And not knowing the answer began arguing about the fire they had lit:

Did he mean to keep it burning 24/7 or just at night?

Was one bonfire enough or should they build two or three?

And what kind of wood should they burn and how high should the flames reach?

The next day the sailors on land became disheartened by the arguing and the captain's absence;

They stopped gathering more wood to keep the fire going;

And after another day the fire went out.

A new storm arose and try as they might they couldn't get a new fire going again in the rain;

More sailors and ships were lost because they let the fire go out.

Jesus calls us to follow Him and be a Community for the world;

By the way we live our lives each and every day as a sign of God's great love for us;

And so that we can show others the grace and love we've come to know;

We follow by God's grace and in the hope and promise that He is coming again.

And so as we begin this season of Advent and make our preparations for the yearly remembrance

Of Christ's first coming on Christmas, keep awake by living in the hope and expectation

That He is coming again and allow that promise to bless and empower our lives;

Keep awake because he may be coming today.

Amen.