

Are you Awake?!

First Congregational Church, Branford
December 2, 2018/Matthew 24:36-44
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Here in the Gospel of Matthew, when Jesus' disciples ask him what would be the signs of the end of the age...he replies...

“But about that day and hour no one knows, neither the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. For as the days of Noah were, so will be the coming of the Son of Man. For as in those days before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day Noah entered the ark, and they knew nothing until the flood came and swept them all away - so too will be the coming of the Son of Man. Then two will be in the field; one will be taken and one will be left. Two women will be grinding meal together; one will be taken and one will be left. Keep awake therefore, for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming. But understand this: if the owner of the house had known in what part of the night the thief was coming, he would have stayed awake and would not have let his house be broken into. Therefore you also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an unexpected hour.”

Speaking of being awake, I'm not the greatest sleeper. In the middle of the night I've been known to lean over and whisper to Ken, “Are you awake?” Oddly enough, he seldom is. In childhood, during sleepovers with friends, I'd ask the same thing--“Are you awake?” Seems like I've gone my whole life asking people if they're awake. As a young child, it was my job on Christmas morning to wake everybody up. I remember doing that one Christmas, only to be told it was 2 a.m., and to “go back to bed”. Of course I couldn't, so I *kept watch* at the top of the stairs gazing longingly and expectantly at the vision below.

Advent is like a young child waking everyone up from a sound sleep because there's an intruder in our house, in our world! *God is with us! Wake up!*

Advent is a blend of expectant *and* mournful longing - waiting for the Messiah to break through the darkness. For centuries the prophets of Israel had foretold of the day when the God of Israel would come to earth, take flesh upon Him, and become their Savior and Redeemer. *For centuries* they longed for him to do that. In the time of Jesus, Israel *longed* for the Messiah to rescue them from Roman rule and oppression, as well as from the Hebrew leaders who were more interested in politics and rigid religious views than they were in offering compassion, and comfort.

In our day, we, too, experience Advent as a time of expectant and mournful longing for things to get better in the world, for the Christ to once again break through the darkness. We long for some glow of hope in a health crisis, a job search, a family struggle. Come shine into my darkness, Jesus. Last Advent I had a family member who was extremely down. I remember when he said, *I wish I could feel better about my worth to God and others....* I know many people feel that way. Even when you tell someone how beloved they are in God's eyes, in your eyes, that the world couldn't revolve without them, they don't believe it. So we pray, don't we for *God's* light to break forth inside their heart, for Christ to fill them and assure them of their belovedness. We can't do it, but God can. Advent is the season of hope, that things *are going to get better*.

In today's reading, Jesus says we need to wake up because the Second Coming will come as a surprise. He says, *neither he*, nor the angels of heaven know the time, the year, the month, the day, or the hour. *God* is the *only* one who knows. People pore over the books of Daniel and Revelation, and attempt to crack their code, but if Jesus doesn't know, they're not going to know either!

End of the world theology was quite prevalent in Jesus' day. Even though Jesus didn't know when, he thought it would be soon - so he preached to keep awake and believe in him - so you won't be left behind!

He compares it to the story of Noah - when God was disturbed by the wickedness of humankind, and sent a flood to take them all out, except for Noah and his family.

I have to take a moment to tell Jesus that he left out the most important part of that story, though! The point of the Noah and the flood story is that God said this: *I will never again curse the ground because of humankind, or destroy every living creature - even though evil is in the human heart* - and he sent the rainbow as a sign of his *grace*... Right there we learned that God won't send disasters as judgment about humankind. Not even at the end of the world. Heck, God didn't even wipe us out when we hung Jesus on a cross 2,200 years after the flood. He just graced us *again*, with resurrection. This God of rainbows and resurrection. As far as taking somebody in the field or kitchen and leaving the other behind, remember how God took *both* criminals on the crosses next to Jesus? Nobody's getting left behind!

But, you may ask, why does a flood or a fire come to one and not another, or a shooting in a synagogue, nightclub, mall, theatre, or school? I suppose two reasons? Nature is unpredictable; *and* there's evil in the world. While God allows evil in the world, and that alone is a hard truth to accept, God himself doesn't send violence, floods, disease to people, whether they're believers or not.

I know, beloved, with all of this bad news, maybe since we aren't in control of what's going to happen from moment to moment, we should just go to bed and pull the covers up over our head!

Is there any reason to stay awake?

You betcha.

The baby Jesus is setting an alarm for us to wake up... to love. To choose love when we want to choose hate, choose a big heart when we want to choose a small heart. Baby Jesus needs us to speak hope so *the weary world can rejoice. For yonder breaks a new and glorious morn.* Yes, it does, *for yonder breaks a new and glorious morn.* He needs us to speak hope to everyone we meet, including our family, and to ourselves - every morning if we have to - that hard things won't have the last word - that *Love* will have the last word.

When there's tragedy, the *last* word is the outpouring of love that comes from the great compassion of Human Beings, neighbor reaching out to neighbor, setting up scholarships, and funds, advocating for one another.

I have to say we're looking for love to have the last word on something... I believe an alarm is going off in the midst of this immigration crisis. Regardless of our political party, I really don't think unleashing tear gas in the face of children, and adults, who are already so traumatized by what they've encountered in their homeland is something we're going to be proud of to have recorded in the history books of when we were on the earth. Will God say to us in heaven, *were you awake? Did you see it? Did you know? Honey, you must've been asleep.*

As Christians we know that Mary, Joseph, and the baby Jesus were turned away again and again until an awakened innkeeper took them in; and, in the same way refugees are fleeing to escape from being murdered, Mary, Joseph, and Jesus had to run away to Egypt to escape from being killed by Herod. They had to seek safety and protection in a foreign land. *Will you let us in? They're trying to kill our baby.*

Let's talk... in our life among the believers conversation today, where we believe God is calling us as a church to wake up to. Where does God most need our particular community with its blend of talents and skills to *make Christ's love known in word and action?*

Kathy Fox sent a New York Times article entitled, *How Loneliness is Tearing America Apart.* It talks about when people are lonely and or isolated, not tapped into a community, not working for good, they have a life closed in on self, and so they give over to negativity, even anger. That makes sense, doesn't it? They also say that loneliness and isolation may also be in part why young men kill. They're not tapped into being a force for good.

Oh, for our church to be like an innkeeper who takes anyone in, who calls together the rejected under our wing, in our house. *To put them to work doing the good news... how about put them to work at the fair! They won't be lonely then!*

Let's give hope to the hopeless. *God is with us!*

If you needed some hope today, maybe that's all you needed to hear - God is with us!

Are you awake out there?

Well, good, 'cause somebody needs to go tell it on the mountain!

Amen.