

First Sunday of Advent December 3, 2023

Introduction to the themes for the day:

Advent is all about expectation. We expect that one day God will make all things new. How aware are we about how messy making new things can be? Maybe that's why every First Sunday of Advent, our Gospel readings speak of preparing for disruptive endings rather than preparing for the birth of a baby.

Mark 13:24-37

24“But 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

How unrealistic to expect ourselves to keep awake all the time. The night of his arrest, Jesus says “keep awake” and the disciples promptly nod off. In a season of expecting, Jesus pulls the clanging klaxon to alert us about just how out of whack our expectations about Jesus’ return can be.

We can expect definitive deliverance. We can expect injustice to be permanently toppled when Jesus returns one day.

How would it go over if Jesus showed up in our churches today? If we let him and his wild ideas in the door at all, what would he call us to do with our time and resources? How many of our precious tables holding our pet agendas, projects, and ‘traditions’ would Jesus upend?

We’re not kidding when we say things like we’ve not loved God whole heartedly or loved our neighbour as ourselves. We’ve sinned both by commission and omission. I’ll add the church has often sinned by complicity; whether the keeping quiet kind or the speaking out kind.

Healing a world does not come without struggle or disruption; take one example in the form of a quote from the late Desmond Tutu, “There can be no reconciliation without truth.” In the Christian tradition there is no Easter without Good Friday.

The church’s task of keeping awake means expectancy—both that God’s got this and restoration will happen. Keeping awake also means clear eyed recognition that restoration requires disruption, sometimes even of things we like and benefit from. Keeping awake means knowing that healing is a process; one that often pushes us into the unfamiliar and even the painful. Keeping awake means the church is fully present living in Advent expectation, Good Friday chaos, and even the bewildering fear and joy that mingle on Easter morning. Keeping awake

means bracing for change among and within our faith community. Keeping awake means remembering the point of the Genesis story. God knows how to engage chaos, harness it, and then begin to create and to re-create.