

1Keep Awake! Advent 1-2020

Keep awake!

Today we lit the first candle in our Advent wreath-- the Sunday of Hope. This Advent in particular, I think we all are in need of hope.

Interestingly, as it is every year, our church's new year begins by focusing on the end times with the expectation of Jesus' final coming to us. Every year we have Jesus telling us of the end times—or as a certain music group sings...the end of the world as we know it.

The disciples attempt to garner from Jesus when this will be. But Jesus does not give them a straight answer...or maybe he does....Keep awake...

The Gospel reads: *13:30 Truly I tell you, this generation will not pass away until all these things have taken place.*

13:31 Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.

13:32 "But about that day or hour no one knows, neither the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father.

13:33 Beware, keep alert; for you do not know when the time will come.

This gives one an impression of doom and gloom... not something we want to focus on in Advent...not something on which to focus in Covid. Not something on which to focus when we are grieving Tim leaving or the loss of a number of parishioners and news of others in ill health.

However, what if the focus is supposed to be about keeping awake! About anticipation! About hope! About the passing away of all things that trouble us. Keep awake. Be ready... For the Son of Man is coming—we just don't know when.

Well Covid has certainly pushed us out of our comfort zones. From not knowing where we can shop or not, to what zone we are in...orange, yellow, red or lockdown... to appointments cancelled due to safety, to not knowing if we will gather with others for Christmas this year. We have to remain alert...to be diligent...to be conscious of all going on around us...as we walk carefully through this Advent... for the love of others... for the love of ourselves.

We are called to be waiting, and watching... living in hope of the one who was sent to redeem us. Of the one to whom we continue to look for guidance...to the One who gave Jesus to be our saviour.

As Christians we have faith that if we remain alert....if we look all around... we will see that Christ is here among us. God does walk among us. God's presence through all those who do simple or complex tasks in order to ensure we are healthy and cared for.

People whose faith in Christ is a model for us and gives us hope. People like Debbie our parish nurse, who has worked tirelessly to make our space safe for us. Who works tirelessly to guide our pastoral care team. People like Sylvia who has been quietly sending cards to shut-ins—to keep them connected to their worshipping community and not feel forgotten. Who brings in magazines in boxes on her walker to be distributed to nursing homes. People like your wardens: Christine, Sharon and Neil who are continuing to provide such strong leadership in uncertain times. People like Rev. Tim who has accepted this new call in Niagara to continue serving our God and God's people. These and all of you have kept awake...listened to God's direction in your lives.

“Keep awake!” sometimes it is necessary or we might just miss something important.

In the past, As Christmas approached, many of us would begin our preparations to celebrate Jesus' birth. Clergy and musicians and altar guilds prepared for services. Many of us prepared for travel or the arrival of loved ones. We long to create for ourselves and others something verging on a Hallmark Christmas movie. The coming of Christmas creates, in most of us, a sense of both longing and urgency. And many years, it doesn't happen the way we plan it. It certainly seems as though it won't this year.

Advent, in all the readings today, reminds us that our ancestors once called out for a Savior, and that we in the Church wait for the return of One even while we know He is here on earth within us and around us.

I am sure many of us, in our lowest points, are tempted to wonder if things will be this way forever. They won't. This we know. We don't know quite how it will change or when. But we know it will. We hope it will. We have faith it will.

Perhaps our unique circumstances this Advent call us to look deeper.

The Reverend Anna Tew writes that Advent whispers to us, urgently, in the dead of winter: “Keep awake!” It is a call of urgency and longing, but also a call of promise: there is hope. Things will not always be as they are. Something is coming that is even bigger than Christmas.

The world still waits for justice. The world still waits for peace.

The world still waits for God.

because of our faith We are able to stay ready for what we know is coming: Victory.

Hope. Peace on earth. Joy. Love.

Advent whispers to us: the night is long and difficult, but the dawn is coming.

13:35 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,

Maybe our unique circumstances this year are giving us an opportunity to focus on Christ...on Christ within and all around.

excerpt from The Rev. Anna Tew is a Lutheran pastor serving Our Savior's Lutheran Church (ELCA) in South Hadley, Massachusetts.