

FCCS December 3, 2017

Rev. Curran Reichert

“Waking up and Staying Awake”

“Awake” Words and music by Laura Hall

A---wake, a---wake, a---rise from your bed
A---wake, a---wake, feel the presence of the Lord
Oh, can you hear the fluttering, of angels’ wings
A---wake, a---wake, a---rise and sing

Cast aside your deepest fears
Put away your doubt
Open all the windows
And let the darkness out
A---wake, a---wake, a---rise from your bed
A---wake, a---wake, feel the presence of the Lord
Oh, can you see--- the light, of the bright morning sun
A---wake, a---wake, a new day has begun
A---wake, a---wake, God’s new day has begun

Mark 13:24-37

13:24 "But in those days, after that suffering, the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will be falling from heaven, and the powers in the heavens will be shaken. Then they will see 'the child of humanity coming in clouds' with great power and glory.

Then God will send out the angels, and gather the elect from the four winds, from the ends of the earth to the ends of heaven. "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.

So also, when you see these things taking place, you know that he is near, at the very gates. Truly I tell you, this generation will not pass away until all these things have taken place. Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away. "But about that day or hour no one knows, neither the angels in heaven, nor the Beloved, but only the Creator. Beware, keep alert; for you do not know when the time will come.

It 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. 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, or else he may find you asleep when he comes suddenly. And what I say to you I say to all: **“Keep awake.”**

When I decorate the house for Christmastime, I have a hard time choosing one set of decorations over the other; like, this year let's do all Dickens villages, or all red and green, or only manger scenes.

In the end, as you will see if you swing by the open house next week, what we end up with at our house is a montage of Christmas themes that tell a story about the different chapters of our life; we picked this up when we lived in Boston, this one in Illinois, or someone gave us this when Ellis Jane was born. No obvious thread ties these things together, but they are all a part of a piece.

The scripture story that kicks off Advent is a bit like that too. It can't quiet settle on one theme. It crams a bunch of metaphors and images along the same genre into one place and leaves us to sort it out. We kind of have to pick and choose which story line to follow.

I don't plan to take on the apocalypse, and the idea that some will be saved and others won't, is like a moldy fruitcake, it needs go. The slave and master metaphors are worse.

And also, it's weird that the passage designated to begin the new church year and set the tone for the first Sunday of a season designed to anticipate Jesus' birth, is a story being told by Jesus who is already full grown, foretelling his own death and second coming.

From its inception, Christianity has been riddled with challenges. Ours is not, nor has it ever been, a straightforward path. Even though there are those amazing images about making the highways straight for the coming of the Lord, alas, it seems that the time we are given on this earth is about striving for rather than attaining lasting peace.

What we can relate to in this passage, is knowing that things can change in an instant. What was, can in a moment no longer be. And that is very unsettling.

We look around our world and see loads of evidence of what was and is no longer. What has replaced it is surely not the kingdom of God. What has replaced it is in fact are the very stuff Jesus fought 2000 years ago to overturn; state sanctioned greed, rape and plunder of the earth and its people, and further disenfranchisement of the poor and vulnerable.

We needn't look beyond our own back yards to see that everything can and has changed overnight, so what are we to make of the promise that God is with us in rebuilding post destruction?

Let's come back to that question in a moment.

This week I attended a convening of the major nonprofits in Sonoma Valley and the fundraising bodies that feel responsible for its' recovery. Redwood Credit Union, the United Way, Tipping Point, Undocufund, North Bay Fire Recovery and the Sonoma Community Foundation sat on the panel. Representatives spoke and then took questions from the two hundred participants. I heard two things that made a lot of sense, both came from Beth Brown the President of the Sonoma Community Foundation she said, "While the fires were indiscriminate, rebuilding is not, and, equity in rebuilding means understanding that some people need more to have the same."

The same problems we faced on October 8th are only magnified nearly two months later. Unfortunately, the structures in place to help us work across divides while much needed are late in coming hence the feeling that we are building this plane while we are flying it.

While that is a disquieting truth, it is also the very moment for which this church exists. We were built to speak truth to power, to stand up for justice, to be voice for the voiceless. This is not new, it is just needed now more than ever and that can provide for a us a source of strength and direction.

A second profound opportunity presented itself to me this week, it was the gift of cradling Catherine Barron's head in my hands as she died on Thursday at Sonoma Valley Hospital. As much justice work as I feel called to do in this world, I also know that the most profound ministry rests in the intimacy shared in sacred moments such as this. As I sat with Lori and her mom, I remembered that love is and always will be the point to which we must return. No matter what goes wrong, or what we did or didn't get done in this lifetime, in the end love is the only thing that matters.

What the gospel story means to say is that believing in God means believing that sometimes when things fall apart, they can get put back together better. The point of the Christmas narrative is to help us see that there is always an opportunity to be reborn, to live the lives we mean to be living, to create a world in which harmony and joy are the norm rather than the exception.

Hope, peace, joy, and love; these are the themes of Advent not because that's the reality with which we live, but because it is the reality for which we strive.

This past election was huge wake up call to those of us who thought and hoped our country was further along, the fires in our county were a similar wake up call to be ready for the worst. But more than being prepared for disaster, both of these things ought to **awaken** in us the longing to create more of what is beautiful, more of what is transformative, and more of what is just.

Some people need more to have the same, more support, more protection, more access. What do you need more of this first Sunday of Advent? What might you be willing to live without in order to help create balance?

For while ours is not a straightforward story, the message of Christianity was and remains clear. Where one suffers injustice, all suffer, and where one is free, we share in that freedom.

Even as we await the coming of Jesus, we are called to make him manifest among us by living as he lived, by loving as he loved.

Advent is about living in that disruptive and disturbing reality known as the already and the not yet. To live in the world as it is, while working for the world as it should be. And vigilance is key, once our eyes have been opened, we cannot afford to go back to sleep.

Amen