

First Sunday of Advent
Wicker Park Lutheran Church
Rev, Jason S. Glombicki
December 27th, 2016

“Keep awake” is what Jesus said. (Matthew 24:42) “Keep awake.” Clearly he has no idea what we’ve been through. I’m exhausted. In the past month we’ve cheered at the World Series; we’ve followed a divisive election cycle; we gathered at Thanksgiving tables with those different from us; and now we’re on to the rest of the holiday season. With all the coffee we’re drinking, we’re awake already! Yet, today Jesus reminds us to “keep awake.”

This is the message we hear in the new liturgical year on the first Sunday of Advent. Today’s letter from Paul to the church in Rome puts us in the same headspace saying, “you know what time it is, how it is now the moment for you to wake from sleep.” However, if you’re like me, at this point I’d rather sleep off my turkey-coma than stay awake. Lucky for us, Jesus and Paul aren’t arguing that we stay up extra late during the darkest weeks of the year. Instead, they are urging that we remain aware. Aware so that we are open, alert, paying attention to what is unfolding, and then reflecting on what it all means - alert, open, and reflecting.¹

I’m pretty bad at this, especially when I’m stressed. As the holidays ramp up

¹ <http://adventdoor.com/2011/11/24/advent-1-in-which-we-stay-awake/>

I become more oblivious to people's emotions. Much like those gathered around Noah before the rains came down and the floods came up, I am absorbed in daily living. I eat and drink; I put on ugly Christmas sweaters; I click a bunch of buttons online and collect the gifts that are delivered; I fight off Seasonal Affective Disorder; I try to get to the gym, clean the house, and sleep. I'm unaware, out of touch, and asleep.

If you're like me, then what do we do? If we asked this question to both Jesus and Paul I think they'd remind us to prioritize. They'd call us to figure out what's most important. That's not to say they'd ask us to ditch the daily tasks. After all, we heard that two people were grinding meal and two were in the field – one was aware and the other was not. You see, our awareness is independent from daily living. Instead, awareness means, “playing the long game.”

Here's what today's readings mean by “playing the long game”: In Isaiah we hear of this utopian image of the world. Isaiah's vision is that the world will no longer learn war. It's a world where God administers justice, inequality is put to rest and, as a result, violence ceases. Isaiah sounds like a textbook idealist. However, if we look back at chapter one, we'd know that he's a realist to the core. In chapter one, Isaiah describes what he sees: violence, bribery, unfaithfulness, desolation, and trampling on the poor. While there are momentary glimpses of hope in that first chapter, they're

ultimately overrun by violence and rebellion.²

Then here in chapter two it starts all over again. It's idyllic. Swords and spears are transformed into plowshares and pruning hooks. Without violence there is no need for swords and spears, so things used to take lives are transformed into items that sustain life. A contemporary example is the picture on the front of your bulletin where a gun is transformed into a shovel. This vision is not unique to Isaiah; in fact, we find it written with the same words in Micah (chapter 4). Both visions remind us that confidence in our future belongs to God who gives us hope in the present. "Every generation needs assurance that the power of the world – whether the Romans of Jesus' time or the principalities and power of our present age – do not determine the future."³ That is what I mean by moving our awareness to the "long game." It's like the famous quote, "the arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends towards justice."

Here's the thing, we as people of faith are in the "long game." With that our awareness is expansive and not simply caught in the here and now. We see the world with different eyes. We're aware of things that go deeper than surface reality.

The "long game" means that the spoken word becomes reality. When it says that "nation shall not lift up sword against nation" and "neither shall they learn war any more," we know this will be fulfilled in time. Remember the creation story where

² http://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=1896

³ Birch, Bruce C. *Preaching the Revised Common Lectionary: Feasting on the Word. Year A, Volume 1 Advent through Transfiguration.* "First Sunday of Advent: Isaiah 2:1-5." P. 2-7.

God spoke and it became reality? In Genesis God said, “Let there be light”; and there was light.”⁴ As Christians we know that the word, as promise, always looks toward fulfillment, and today’s spoken word is no exception!

Another “long game” situation we experience is that the future belongs to God. Isaiah reminds us that we are invited to walk into the future with our God. We’re invited to learn peace and not war. We’re invited to turn hate into love; violence into peace; corruption into justice; blindness into awareness. We’re invited to illuminate the darkness and become aware of that which is hidden. We’re called to open our eyes to oppression of every form, we’re invited to prioritize relationship; we’re challenged to lift up the weak; and we’re implored to strive towards understanding. We are invited to participate in bending that arc towards justice.

Today God invites us to “keep awake.”

To help us with that “long game” awareness we’re going to chant the “Great Litany” in a moment. I know it’s long, but we’re in the “long game,” right? My hope is that we will become more aware of the “long game” reality. Generations have sung this litany to open their minds to things we can easily forget in our narrow-minded living. Today the “Great Litany” is our prayer and our confession. For when we gather here in prayer and confession we become more aware of our darkened world *and* in God’s new day of light that begins now.

⁴ Erskine, Noel Leo. *Preaching the Revised Common Lectionary: Feasting on the Word. Year A, Volume 1 Advent through Transfiguration*. “First Sunday of Advent: Isaiah 2:1-5.” P. 2-7.

As we center ourselves in this experience, I invite you to reflect on your awareness. Step into the Advent season. I invite you to wait with me. Not wait for Christmas Day, not wait for gifts, and not wait for winter break. Rather wait with me, wait with the church in the darkness of violence, hate, and uncertainty. Don't wait in a passive way just to make it through, but actively wait for a time when oppression will cease, when guns will be turned into shovels, and when God will heal our division.

Join me here in our waiting. As we wait, we will read through the book of Matthew. Matthew will remind us that actively waiting means embracing awareness and noticing the needs of others. Matthew will remind us that out of the blue we might just find Jesus – we might find God around the corner in the form of a hungry person, or Jesus in an ill-clothed neighbor, or the Holy Spirit in someone sick or imprisoned. Here in the hopefulness of Advent, now in the awareness of the season, here (out of the blue) we find God. Keep awake! Be ready. God *is* among us. Amen.