

Wicker Park Lutheran Church

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Grace and Peace to you all in the name of our Christ Jesus!

Keep awake, and be ready are the watchwords that we hear from our gospel reading today. This week, especially the week right after thanksgiving with so much cooking, eating, traveling, and hosting families, we may be exhausted. Unlike the Lutheran churches in the US as far as I have seen, the sermons in my church back in India are long, ranging from 25 minutes to 45 minutes and sometimes, even an hour. And don't worry! My sermon today is not that long. When the sermon gets too long, the congregation members tend to doze off. Of course, it is a challenge sometime to keep the congregation members or students in the classroom awake even when there is a clear timeframe of how long it is going to go.

In Matthew's gospel, Jesus is calling the people to be awake and to pay attention but without a timeframe. No one knows when! – So, keep awake and be Ready!

In the earlier verses of this chapter, Jesus talks about the destruction of the temple. The disciples get curious that they ask Jesus privately when this is going to happen. They also add other questions like, what is the sign of your coming and end of the age. Two questions – when and what? Jesus' response to the first question is no one knows.

If some of you are students or you can think of your student life, deadlines play an important role in the completion of our homework. My brain works in line with deadlines. Every semester we may think to complete the assignments and papers well ahead of the final week. It never works, it never worked for me. Even if I sit for hours in the library, there is not even a single line other than a blank word

document. But when the deadline is close by, thoughts flow perfectly. What Jesus says is like an assignment with no specified deadline. There is a deadline, but no one knows when. That is why we have to be awake and ready.

The gospel provides three examples – 1. Time of Noah 2. Two men working in the field and two women grinding meals where one is taken and one is left and 3. A house owner can protect the house if they know the time thief will come. All three cases represent the regular lives of the people – eating, drinking, and marrying; working in the fields and grinding meal, and owning a house. The gospel writer Matthew talks about the time not in the sense of the nearness but in the sense of watchfulness. People are not aware of the time and that is the reason, watchfulness and being awake are necessary. Advent season is a time of hope and anticipation. Jesus' coming into our lives is a promise of hope for justice and peace. Christmas is not just a one-time event that happened several years ago in history. It is also the "today" aspect that what it means in our lives today.

During Noah's time, people did not know that the cataclysm is coming until they were destroyed. We must understand what is happening within us and around us. We live in a world that is very fast and we are forced to follow a certain routine which became part of our lives. In this fast-running world, unjust forces are acting so vibrantly that sometimes we are not able to look around and be attentive to the things happening around us. Our routines of Christmas take over sometimes – baking the cake, cooking Christmas food, going to the parties and having celebrations and what all. Can we stop doing them? However, Jesus is not asking us to stop the daily activities of living our lives, but we are called to see what is our priority. We should be able to see our neighbors who are not able to be completely joyful because of losing a loved one whom they cannot even see because of

immigration issues, or the people living in warzones in Ukraine, and Russia, where people had to be in fear each minute of their lives, or people in Myanmar who are in fear of being killed by the military any time. Advent once again calls us to be aware and attentive to the needs of our neighbors and that is the hope that one-day justice will prevail.

The Isaiahic prophecy also calls the people, “come, let us walk in the light of the LORD!” Isaiah describes God not as a king or ruler, but as a teacher and judge. At the top of the mountain, Yahweh teaches the ways and in turn, the people would walk in his ways. Isaiah’s glorious vision of turning swords and spears into plowshares and pruning hooks is a great vision that is also shared by prophet Micah. We are still voicing against gun violence, especially in Chicago. When we go into the toy shop for kids, why are there several toy guns and swords? Why there are so many video games that are about killing and shooting someone? Are we still fine with our kids using toys of guns, machine guns, and swords? I have seen kids happily saying that they killed these many people in their video games. It is very sad that on the one hand, we want to get rid of gun violence but on the other hand, they are still in the hands of our younger generation in the form of toy gun, video games, and PlayStation fostering the idea that you can win by destroying.

Jesus is talking about the suddenness of people getting into the flood, the suddenness of one person being taken away, and the suddenness of the thief breaking into the house. If we are not alert and attentive, the suddenness of God’s coming will not make sense. If we would want God to intrude on our lives, we are called to be conscious of what is happening around us, our neighbors, the immigrants, the children, and our own homes. Let us be open and attentive to make conscious changes.

As the ELCA document on renewal of baptism says, “Baptism is a significant part of our faith journey as we come from the baptismal waters to live a new life as children of God. Our baptism sets us out on a lifelong journey that is characterized by our relationship to God, our relationship to our faith community, our relationships in our community and the wider world. Living our baptismal covenant means living a life of growth in the faith practices of discipleship.”¹ It is time, church, it is time - time to know the signs, time to wake up, time to turn the swords and spears to plowshares and pruning hooks. Amen!

¹ <https://www.elca.org/Our-Work/Congregations-and-Synods/Faith-Practices/Living-Our-Baptismal-Covenant>