

“Time to Wake Up” Advent 1A Sermon A Sermon for Every Sunday

This sermon is based on Matthew 24:36-44

It's the First Sunday of Advent again. What does that even mean? Advent is about waiting for something important. The word Advent just means coming or arrival. We're waiting for Jesus to arrive. Actually, we're waiting for two things at the same time. We are waiting for Jesus to come back and fix everything that is wrong with the world, and we're waiting to celebrate Christmas and the baby Jesus.

The second coming of Jesus is a little scary and most of us don't mind waiting a bit for that, but it's hard to wait for Christmas.

I remember I would tell my children when they were little that they couldn't wake me up until 6:00. One Christmas morning I opened my eyes because I felt something. It was someone breathing. It was my son Eli. He was only about 3 feet tall, and he was standing right by my bed right in front of my face, watching the alarm clock, waiting for it to be 6 so he could wake me. The waiting was about to be over for him. He was about to wake his parents and spend the day opening gifts and playing with them. Christmas is easy when you're a kid. Things get more complicated later.

It is more complicated than when we were little. As mature Christians, we are called to get our hearts ready for

Christmas. We are asked to stop rushing around, making lists, and buying gifts and ponder the wonder of God coming to earth as a human child. We are being asked to make room for the Christ child in our lives. Advent is also about getting ready to meet the grown-up Jesus. We will see him when he comes again and the world as we know it passes away or when **we** die and our lives as we know them pass away. Advent is about being ready for whatever is coming and not knowing when it will be.

We are waiting for the time that Isaiah promised where swords really will be pounded into plows, because wars will be a thing of the past. We are waiting for a time when the lion will lie down with the lamb and the lamb will not be afraid. We are waiting for at a time when Democrats and Republicans can have supper together without fighting. Waiting is hard.

The early Christians also had a hard time waiting. St. Matthew most likely wrote our gospel lesson in the early 80s of the first century, about fifty years after Jesus' death and resurrection. And like most early Christian communities, Matthew's congregation had been expecting Jesus to return right away.

Some scholars think that the Gospels were written in part to encourage Christians who were confused and discouraged by Jesus' delayed return. For this reason, Matthew, like Mark and Luke, devotes a section of his Gospel to exhorting his congregation to stay awake, keep prepared, and wait with anticipation for Jesus' return. If

they aren't watching and waiting, Matthew suggests, they might miss Jesus' second coming or they might not be ready.

The trouble is that two thousand years later, we've been waiting an awfully. Long. Time. So long, in fact, that most people aren't waiting any more. Most people have given up waiting for Jesus and expecting His return.

I mean, really, if we can't even wait until after Thanksgiving until Friday morning to shop for deals, how do we expect our people to keep waiting for two millennia for Jesus to come back!?!?

It's hard but we are being told to wait. We are being reminded to stay awake. No one, Jesus says at the beginning of the passage, knows when the Lord will come. The angels don't know. Jesus himself does not even know.

We are given the frightening example of Noah's ark. There was a flood, and it was pretty much the end of the world for most people. They didn't know it was coming and they perished in a watery death.

The end is coming like a thief in the night, and you need to stay awake! At the end of the passage Jesus repeats that the Son of Man will come at an unexpected hour.

It's difficult to think about meeting Jesus. Although it is a good thing, it means life as you have always known it is

over. We will meet Jesus when he comes back to rule over heaven and earth, **or** we will meet him before that when we breath our last. Either way, we don't know when that will be. Staying awake means being ready. It means living your life in such a way that you are **not** afraid of the end. Staying awake means living in a way that leaves you unafraid to face the Lord.

Part of my job as a pastor is to plan and preside over funerals. Oftentimes funerals make you think of your own death. They remind you that you don't have an unlimited number of days on this earth. I remember one for a nice woman who everyone loved. A group of her friends were talking to me after her funeral. They were glad she died in her own bed, in her home with people who loved her. I said that is how I would like to go.

What followed was a kind of morbid discussion about how the people involved in this conversation would like to die when their time came. I have always said it would be sad to die before my husband and that I hope I go first. He said the same thing. The only solution to that would be to die at the same time. Neither of us wants to suffer so maybe a fiery crash that we don't see coming would work.

Everyone in the conversation agreed that it would be nice to just pass away without a long illness, to just not see it coming—to maybe die in your sleep one night when you are 100 years old.

There is a problem with sudden death. You don't get a chance to say goodbye to people. You don't get to make amends if you are not on good terms with someone you love. Thinking about that is important. You don't get to choose how you die or when Jesus comes back. The only solution **is to be ready right now.**

The only solution is to say you're sorry when you hurt someone and do your best to make it right. The only solution is to make your corner of the world a little better right now because you are not guaranteed another chance. You might get tomorrow, you might get a thousand tomorrows, but you might not. This could be your only day to make the world a more Godly place. We had better **stay awake.**

When I was growing up, it was my mother who was in charge of saying I love you and giving hugs and kisses. If you needed a shoulder to cry on or a listening ear, you went to her. If you needed money to go to a movie or the tire changed on your car, you went to dad. He loved my sisters and I, but he **didn't** say it.

I knew it. He showed it by taking an interest in our school work, by threatening to beat up boys that bothered us and by bragging about us to my grandmother. We knew he loved us, he was just embarrassed to say, "I love you." Maybe his parents never said it to him.

When my father was 80 years old, his health began to fail. He fell a lot. He couldn't go places like he used to. He got

thinner. It dawned on me that he was not going to be around forever. I started calling him more often even though he wasn't a person who liked to chat on the phone. My mother had passed away years earlier and he was lonely, so he got over not liking to chat and we had some great conversations.

One day I wondered if I could end our chats the way I used to with my mother, what if I said, "I love you Dad?" Would it make him uncomfortable? What if he didn't say it back? That would hurt me. One day I just blurted it out at the end of one of our calls. I said, "I have to go now, love you dad." I held my breath and waited. He seemed a little startled, but he said it back. "Love you too." It became a regular thing. My father lived to be 86. We had about 6 years where we finally had meaningful conversations and ended them with "I love you." I am grateful for those conversations, but I wish I had not waited. It took the realization that he was not going to live forever for me to risk saying I love you to someone who I thought might not be able to say it back.

None of us are going to live forever. None of us knows when Jesus will come back. It sounds like a threat when Jesus says, "The end will come like a thief in the night, so you had better wake up!"

It might be a threat, but it's also a promise. It's a promise like Christmas morning is a promise. It's a promise like the first day of vacation is a promise or the day you will meet your one true love is a promise. Wake up. Stop waiting to

live a life full of love and hope. Wake up because you have no idea the blessings and wonders this very day will hold. I don't know how many days you have left, but you have this one! This is a good day to do something spectacular, something loving and generous in the name of the Lord. Even the angels don't know how many days we will get, but we know that we had better stay awake and not miss any of them. Amen.

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