

Sermon

Sunday, December 1, 2019

Matthew 24: 36-44

Keep Awake

The Rev. David Martin

“Keep awake!”

Hopefully that isn't a comment on a boring sermon I'm about to give. I'm not begging you to try and keep your eyes open while I'm droning on up here.

In today's gospel, Jesus tells his friends to “Keep awake.”

Leading up to the passage from Matthew we just read, Jesus has been telling his friends about the coming of the Son of Man. He's been explaining that he's going to be killed and leave them and then Jesus tells them he's going to return.

But today we heard how Jesus told them no one – not even the angels in heaven....in fact, not even he himself – knows when that will be.

So, we had better “Keep awake!”

Jesus reminds us that no one expected the great flood except Noah. Everyone else had not been awake. Jesus then uses an example of someone's house being broken into. Indeed, if you knew when someone was going to burgle your house, you'd stay awake and make sure they didn't steal your stuff. It would pay off to keep awake and watch your house.

Most dramatically, Jesus paints a picture of people disappearing. Two workers will be farming in a field – suddenly one will be gone and the other left behind. Two women will be grinding grain – suddenly one will be gone and the other left behind.

This image is often used to illustrate the “rapture.” Some Christians think this means Jesus will return and the good people will be immediately drawn up into heaven and the bad people will be left here on earth. Maybe that's true. But that's not exactly what Jesus said here. He isn't very specific. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus said the meek will inherit the earth. Maybe this story today tells us that those left behind are the meek, and they are indeed inheriting the earth. Maybe those who disappear have been taken away to face some kind of judgment.

But I digress. Jesus' point is this: **you don't know what's going to happen and you don't know when it's going to happen.** Therefore, keep awake.

So today I want us to think about keeping awake.

Today is the first Sunday of Advent. Advent is the beginning of our Christian year. The four Sundays leading up to Christmas and the intervening weeks make up this season. Traditionally, it is the time we as Christians prepare for the coming of Jesus – get ready for the birth of the Christ child. Our readings from the Bible during this season are usually prophecies from the Old Testament foretelling the coming of Jesus. The Gospels are often about John the Baptist telling us to “prepare the way of the Lord,” and about Mary learning she will give birth to Jesus, and Joseph finding out about that situation.

We hear these stories with warmth and anticipation. Let us prepare ourselves for the coming of Christ.

But today we hear a much less comforting lesson. You don't know what's going to happen and you don't when it's going to happen. Yes. Christ is coming. We know how he appeared 2,000 years ago, but THIS time we don't know how it's going to happen.

So, we'd better keep awake! Perhaps a more relevant way of saying this might be:

Pay attention!

Keep awake! Pay attention!

And that reminds me of a T-shirt that's been around a long time. The image on the shirt shows a traditional looking Jesus with outstretched arms. The text reads: "Jesus is coming. Look busy."

Let's adapt that and add it to our list.

Keep awake! Pay attention! Get busy!

In a blog posting for Christian Century magazine's website, Melissa Bane Sevier suggests that keeping awake and paying attention is just as much an Advent theme as the more traditional preparation.

**Keep awake. Pay attention to the people you encounter. Get busy. How will your interactions with them aim toward being holy moments?**

Be awake to the possibility that every moment is a holy moment. Last week during the Hollyberry Fair, Mother Sylvia was reading Christmas stories to children here in the Nave. She got to "and suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and singing *"Glory to God in the highest..."*" Our four-year-old friend, Jordan, piped up "I know that song." And began singing *"Glory to God in the highest, sing glory to God..."* Jordan wasn't interrupting a story. Instead it was a holy moment, a holy moment when an energetic 4-year-old realized he knows the song the angels sang on the first Christmas night. Holy moments happen all the time. Pay attention to them.

**Keep awake. Pay attention to the people least like you. Get busy. This may be difficult, but how will you learn from them?**

Be awake to people who are different from you. What can they teach you? Tolerance? Acceptance? Perhaps someone with a different point of view can, at the very least, teach you that there is more than one way to look at something. Perhaps it would be helpful to actually seek out people who are least like us. Wouldn't that be a trip? Remember, you don't always have to agree with every person you meet. But we are called to love our neighbor as ourselves.

**Keep awake. Pay attention to God and to what God is doing in the world. Get busy. How can you awaken your senses to notice goodness and peace?**

Be awake to goodness and peace around you. Do you read, or listen to, or watch the news and shake your head in despair? I'm not suggesting you bury your head in the sand and ignore bad or ridiculous things that take place in our world. But pay attention – even seek out – good news of strangers being kind to

one another. Be awake to people who spend their time helping others. And if these incidents seem to few and far between perhaps you can become a story for others which illustrates God's goodness and peace.

**Keep awake. Pay attention to yourself. Self-awareness is highly underrated. Get busy. How will you be awake to your body, mind, soul, spirit, and values during Advent? How will that self-awareness translate into how you spend your time?**

Be awake to you. Are you doing things because you think SHOULD do them? Because someone else expects them to get done? Because that's the way it's always been done? Be awake to what will benefit you and your well-being – and in turn the well-being of everyone who is around you. When you take care of yourself, you are better able to love others.

**Keep awake. Pay attention to the people closest to you. Get busy. How will you give and receive love in those relationships?**

Be awake to the people you are close to you - to the people you love.

I saved this one for last because it brings us to what we're doing here today. We are baptizing Raegan. We are welcoming her into the community of Christians all around the world. We are telling her she is marked as Christ's own forever.

I have known Raegan's mother, Kate, for over 11 years. We worked closely together at a big architectural firm here in town. She was my work spouse. I, obviously, left that profession many years ago and was called to a new vocation. Kate is now a principle at that firm. Although I have not always kept in as close touch with her as I wish I had, we have remained friends.

I was awake to Kate's request when she wanted to baptize her second child, because I love and care about her. I also love and care about her husband, Richard, and their first child, Roman. Through stories and personal experience, I also know and love their entire family.

And then because I have a close relationship with this family, Fr. Christopher and Mother Sylvia are close to them as well and planned this baptism. And by extension, all of you who are here today who are close to me and to this church community are tied to the Dimock and Barone families as well.

Today as a community, we are going to keep awake. We are going to pay attention. And we are going to get busy by promising to support Raegan, and her entire family, in their lives ahead. We must keep awake and walk with them in their lives in Christ.

Finally, the opposite of keeping awake isn't falling asleep. It's complacency. It's easy to fall into a pattern of doing the same thing over and over. And the problem is we then expect the fantastic, new results when we haven't bothered to do anything different ourselves.

Jesus tells us that we don't know what to expect or when to expect it. So today as we baptize Raegan and we renew our own baptismal vows let's wake up and shake things up and face the world in a whole new way.

As we deal with people we love, everyone we encounter, people who are different from us, with ourselves, and as we look for God's good works and peace in our lives each day.

It's the first Sunday of Advent. We're starting a new Christian year. Let's make some Christian resolutions:

Let's keep awake.

Let's pay attention.

And now, let's get busy.