

November 28, 2021

Texts: Isaiah 64:1-9; Mark 13:33-37

Title: “Wake Up!”

First Sunday of Advent

On one particular night it was Pastor Dick Pearson’s job, along with a man who had a pick-up truck, to get a pregnant ewe (female sheep), which was being kept in the parsonage garage, to the church for the live nativity scene. They went to get her about a half hour before performance time. Due to her delicate condition they carefully lifted her into the bed of the truck, and Dick rode in the back with her. But when the truck stopped at a light, she bolted and jumped over the tailgate and started running down a busy city street away from the church with Pastor Dick in hot pursuit. Passing cars slammed on their brakes to avoid hitting them. People yelled, pointed and laughed; and the ewe and preacher ran on. He finally caught her in some bushes at a nearby College. They loaded her into the truck and got her into place with two minutes to spare. Dick said all the way to the church, he kept thinking about the lines from *My Fair Lady*: “Kick up a rumpus, but don’t forget the compass, and get me to the church on time.” I hope your Christmas season won’t be quite that hectic.

On this first Sunday in Advent, many of us are adjusting to the idea that we are now in the season of getting ready for Christmas. Advent, however, is about much more than that. On this first Sunday of the season, the theme is traditionally about our future; in particular, of a time when Christ will return to establish his kingdom. That’s why Advent begins with this passage from Mark, chapter 13.

Some Christians will give more thought and emphasis on Christ's return than others. But regardless, Christianity's always maintained that history has a direction, and one day Christ will return to reign over all. So how do we take it seriously?

Jesus tells us a story, saying "...keep awake – for you don't know when the master of the house will come, in the evening, or at midnight, or when the rooster crows, or at dawn..." There are significant events in Mark's gospel that take place at these different times. All relate to our preparing for the coming of Christ. So let's consider them, briefly. **As we wait for Christ's return, what's the significance of evening?**

In the very next chapter Mark tells us "...when it was evening, Jesus ate his very last meal with his disciples, and tells them, 'one of you will betray me.'" Evening is the time of betrayal. Think about that for a moment. What would it mean for us to betray Christ? How about if we forgot totally about the deeper meaning of his birth?

Many who celebrate Christmas have no real understanding of who he was or is. Betrayal comes in many forms, of course. It may mean ignoring the needs of those around us. It may be the focusing of all our energies on the peripherals of this season and not on the main reason. That's the evening--a time of betrayal.

"Therefore stay awake for you don't know when the master of the house will come—whether in the evening, or at midnight." **What about midnight?** Mark continues the story in chapter 14. Immediately after the Last Supper: "They went to a place called Gethsemane..." It was around midnight and the disciples are with him but they fell asleep when Jesus needed them the most.

Is it possible for today's disciples of Christ to be sleeping on the job so to speak when it comes to our participating in making this world a little better, a little more loving, a bit more hopeful? One time a man went to his doctor and asked if the doctor could help with a snoring problem. The man said, "As soon as I go to sleep, I begin to snore. It happens all the time. What can I do doctor?" The doctor asked, "Does it bother your wife?" "Oh," the man answered, "it disturbs the whole congregation." Advent's a time to wake up and go about the calling Christ has given us. And it's also a great time to invite a friend to worship with you, by the way.

In the evening one betrayed him. At midnight, they were all asleep. "Keep watch," says the Lord, "because you don't know when the owner of the house will come back--whether in the evening, or at midnight, or when the rooster crows..."

We all know what happened when the rooster crowed, don't we? Jesus said to Peter, "Tonight--before the rooster crows twice you'll deny me three times." Of course he says he won't do it, sure enough he does and he hears a rooster crow. Mark tells us, "And he broke down and wept."

I love the way we see the disciples with all their shortcomings. We don't talk much about grace at Christmas time, but surely it deserves to be talked about. Children are told to be good because Santa's coming to town. But they need to know that God loves them whether they're bad or good. That's the Gospel. When the time of testing came, Peter failed. But that didn't mean Christ didn't still love him and couldn't use him. It's important to realize and repent of our sins for these are also times of finding

God's grace. "Therefore keep awake – for you don't know when the master of the house will come, in the evening, or at midnight, or when the rooster crows, or at dawn." **What a wonderful thing is the coming of dawn.**

On that Easter morning, Mary and the others are at the tomb. They find the stone rolled away and inside is a young man dressed in a white robe. "Don't be alarmed, You are looking for Jesus the Nazarene, who was crucified. He has risen."

Three days prior though was a very dark time as Christ hung on a cross. But, at dawn, on the Sabbath, the women discovered that he'd risen just as he said he would.

Have you noticed that we celebrate Advent and Christmas during the darkest days of the year? But there's a light that "shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it." ...the light of Jesus Christ.

The evening of betrayal, the midnight when the disciples slept, the crowing of the rooster and the grace it represents are all preparation for the dawn of the resurrection. They also represent our situation as we await His return. We still live in a world of betrayal, a world in which the church is sometimes asleep, a world still depending on God's grace as its only hope. We await the dawn, the return of Christ to dispel the darkness for all time, to set up his kingdom of love and peace and justice for all. How or when is he coming? Not important. What matters is that we stay awake, stay committed, stay focused by being bearers of light in this world. Amen.