**Sermon 12/2/18**

**Gospel Reading Luke 21:25-36**

It was a dark and stormy night.

Exhausted by all the Christmas shopping, activities, and chores,

        a husband and wife were relieved to be getting some much needed rest.

About 3 am the couple were awakened

        by loud pounding on the front door.

The man got up and opened the door to see what the problem was.

He discovered a very drunk stranger, standing in the pouring rain.

The stranger asked if he could have a push.

“Not a chance," answered the man. "It is three o'clock in the morning.”

He slammed the door and returned to bed.

"Who was that?" asked his wife.

"Just some drunk guy asking for a push," he grumbled.

"Did you help him?" she asked.

“No. I did not. It is three o'clock in the morning and it is pouring rain outside!”

But his wife persisted. "Don't you remember about four months ago,

         when we got a flat tire,

         and those two guys stopped in the pouring rain and helped us?

I think you should help him, and you should be ashamed of yourself!"

Dutifully, the husband did as he was told.

He got up, and dressed and went outside into the pouring rain.

He couldn't see any sign of the stranger, or a car.

He called out into the dark, "Hello. Are you still there?"

"Yes," came back the answer.

"Do you still need a push?" called out the man.

"Yes! Please!" came the reply from the darkness.

"Where are you?" asked the husband.

"Over here on the swing!" replied the drunk.

Shocked and angry, the man marched around the corner of the house

         to the swing set.

The stranger was calmly sitting on the swing, holding tightly to the chains.

He looked up hopefully at the man.

The husband was sorely tempted to shove the stranger

           into the huge puddle of water and return to his warm comfortable bed.

But for some odd reason, he walked behind the swing

           and gave the drunk a gentle push.

"Oh, thank you!" mumbled the stranger.

The husband kept pushing the swing for several minutes.

The drunk stood up, said, "That was wonderful, thank you."

And he stumbled off into the rain and darkness.

When the husband returned to his warm bedroom

           he told his wife about the strange encounter,

she looked at her husband and said,

“I would have expected you to be angry, but you seem so calm.”

"Well," he said, "when he left, I sat down on that swing for a while.

It was so calming and peaceful.

My problems seemed not so important anymore, and I felt God was with me.”

Jesus invites us to be on guard, and to be alert at all times.

If we get bogged down by our to do lists, and the problems and difficulties

           in our lives, it is easy to forget that God is near to us.

He has promised to be with us always. But it is so easy to forget or not notice.

An atheist was hiking alone on a remote nature trail.

He was enjoying the scenery and wild life so much that he wandered far off the trail.

Late in the day, as the sun was approaching the horizon,

         he knew he had to return before the darkness over took him.

But as he looked around, he realized he was hopelessly lost.

He turned one way, and then another, but he could find no sign of the trail.

As darkness approached, he began to panic.

Then he did something which he had never done before.

He prayed to God for help.

The hiker did make it out of the forest, and was sharing his experience

         with some friends.

When the atheist mentioned praying, one of his friends asked,

           “You? You prayed to God? How did God answer your prayer?”

The atheist replied, "Well, before God could answer my prayer,

        a wilderness guide came along and brought me to safety."

How sad. This man missed seeing God's presence in his rescue.

He could not see God at work in his trouble.

Because it didn't happen the way he thought it should happen.

When he finally reached out to God, he missed experiencing God.

It is too bad he was not familiar with the parable of the fig tree.

"Look at the fig tree and all the trees. As soon as they sprout leaves

         you can see for yourselves that summer is already near.

When you see these things taking place, you know the kingdom of God is near.

We are now in the season of Advent.

As we get ready to celebrate the Birth of Christ,

           we also anticipate His Second Coming.

Advent means the presence or coming.

As we prepare to celebrate the birth of Jesus,

         at the same time we look forward to the second coming of Christ.

We are to be alert and ready for both celebrations.

By being alert at all times, we won't miss God's loving presence all around us.

We prepare to be ready for both events when we listen for God's

             quiet and peaceful voice in our lives.

Advent is a time of continuing to notice the opportunities God gives us to help one

another, encourage each other, and share the story of God's love with others.

The word Advent means coming.

It is a time of expectant waiting and preparation of the birth of Jesus,

         the day in which God entered our world in human form as a helpless baby.

And through that child our sins are forgiven, and through Him we have life,

          the offer of abundant life on earth, and eternal life in heaven.

It is easy to think life is just a bunch of random, meaningless events.

But Christmas teaches us something very different.

It helps us to see that God has not abandoned us.

He is not ignoring us. He has a plan and a purpose.

And He is inviting us into His plan, to be an active part of his purpose.

By being watchful and alert, we will experience his grace, mercy, power and love.

Often it seems as if the world is spinning out of control,

         and sometimes our lives feel that way.

Too many things are happening, not all of which are good.

We experience the hardships and the harshness of life.

But when we look upon the baby in the manger,

        we can remember God is in control, and he is caring for us.

Especially throughout the Advent season

         we remember and celebrate the birth of Baby Jesus,

         even as we look to the time when Jesus will come again

         and take us home to live with him forever.

In the days before Connecticut became a state,

          the colonial legislature was in session

          when thick black clouds suddenly filled the sky.

They blocked out all the sunlight,

         and the world suddenly became a dark and scary place.

One of the legislators shouted,

        “It is the day of judgment! Let us go home and get ready!”

But one member of the legislature, who happened to be an old church deacon,

          stood up and said, "Brethren, it may be the day of judgment - I do not know.

The Lord may come.

But when He does, I want Him to find me at my post,

         doing my duty up to the very last moment.

        Mr. Speaker, I move that candles be brought in,

        and that we get on with the business of the colony."

There are many dark happenings in our lives today, fires and tornadoes,

          shootings, sickness and death, murders, abuse, and pain.

But throughout all of these things we heed the words of Jesus:

          Be alert at all times,

          Know that the kingdom of God is near,

          Be on guard so our hearts are not weighed down with the worries of this life.

God is with us through all the difficult times.

Advent reminds us to look up to him,

          and continue to follow his will, and to do his work, throughout the world.

As we have been saying all year:

          Let us Keep Christmas Every Day

          In our hearts and in our lives.

And let us share the story, and hope and peace of Christmas

          with everyone we encounter, every chance we get.

AMEN