**Be Ready**

November 27, 2022 Advent I

Isaiah 2: 1-5 Russell Mitchell-Walker

Matthew 24: 33-44

Many of you know that our oldest son Tyler got married to Jessica Brook this summer. They are both indigenous and Jessica’s family includes those who are only traditional and those who are only Christian so there were two ceremonies to celebrate this occasion, an indigenous ceremony and a Christian service. The Indigenous service would be at the end of a Sundance ceremony that Jessica’s Mooshim (grandfather) was leading and hosting, and he would lead the wedding ceremony as well. It was at Ocean Man Reserve, about 2 hours Southeast of Regina. The church service was to be here at Eastside later that day. We figured the Sundance would be finished around lunch followed by the service and then we would head to Regina for the Church service, which we figured should be able to happen by 5ish. Then we would have a BBQ. We also knew that we would need to be flexible, knowing that indigenous events happen when all things are ready, not necessarily at a designated time. So, we had friends ready to BBQ and let people into the church, with whom we were texting throughout the day. We also had my cousin, Cathy, who is a wedding planner keeping on top of things and keeping people informed here in Regina. It turns out that the indigenous ceremony started around 5pm. While we were waiting in the afternoon, we ended up helping Jessica’s family, her stepmom, prepare food for the feast while she worked to finish the ribbon skirts and vests for the bridal party. It turned out she needed every bit of that time, to finish the tasks. The last vest came off the sewing machine just before the ceremony started! Once the ceremony there was over we headed to Regina and decided en-route to feed people first, since it was just after 6pm, so we got our friends to start cooking and Cathy contacted all those who came at 5pm to invite them to come for food, then the service, which happened around 9pm. It turned out to be a beautiful day all around, as we were able to let go of needing to know exactly when things would happen.

This is part of the message of the gospel reading today, that no one knows the hour when we will experience Jesus’ coming, so we need to be ready and awake. Today we begin the season of Advent, a time when we prepare for the coming of Jesus, the coming of Christ into our world and our lives. Advent is a time of waiting and preparing. Too often we get so focused on preparing for the Christmas gatherings, parties and gift giving that we forget to prepare for the celebration of the Christ child, or we miss the mystery of Christ breaking into our lives. So, Jesus tells us to be ready, for we do not know when or how Christ will come. Sometimes some aspects of Christianity have gotten hung up on Christ’s second coming so much so that they forget to live in this time. Some get focused on thinking they know when Christ will come, forgetting that Jesus said no one knows, only God knows. The metaphors for his coming, of workers in the field, women grinding meal, or a thief in the night, are just that, metaphors. They are not meant to indicate that when Jesus comes, some will be taken. It is a metaphor for being surprised. The message for us is to live faithfully, making the most of every day. We are responsible for doing God’s will on earth as it is in heaven, for the Kingdom of God has come in Jesus’ coming.

Isaiah proclaims this vision clearly in todays reading from the prophet. It is a wonderful vision about when God’s house is established, God’s people are taught God’s way and walk in God’s path. Once this happens all the nations work together, and convert their weapons to gardening tools, and walk in the light of God, caring for all in need. It is the people following God’s ways, who make this happen. This is the vision of God, that we are called to work toward, to embody, to prepare for, and be ready for. In working to fulfill this vision, we are being ready. Advent is a time to remind ourselves of this vision and call, to embrace God’s message of peace and justice embodied in Jesus. It is a time to dare to hope and dream boldly that this vision be established.

This past year, The United Church of Canada has developed a [call and vision](https://united-church.ca/community-and-faith/welcome-united-church-canada/our-call-and-our-vision) to speak to “how we boldly embody the Christian story in this time, filled with the certainty of resurrection and hope for new life.” Reflecting on the core of the United Church’s purpose for such a time as this, the United Church call is:

**Deep Spirituality**

**Bold Discipleship**

**Daring Justice**

The vision reflects what the church aspires to be over a 5-10 year span:

***Called by God, as disciples of Jesus, The United Church of Canada seeks to be a bold, connected, evolving church of diverse, courageous, hope-filled communities united in deep spirituality, inspiring worship, and daring justice.***

Embracing this call and vision, as we enter this Advent season may we deepen our spirituality to dare to dream boldly and embrace the hope of justice.

We dare to dream and hope for bold steps to drastically reduce our emissions to address climate change.

We dare to dream and hope for bold courage to embrace the costs of eliminating houselessness in Regina, getting it in the budget, knowing that the cost of not doing so is much more.

We dare to dream and hope for anti-racist education and initiatives to be embraced in our communities.

We dare to dream and hope for an end to sexual harassment and systemic sexism.

We dare to dream and hope for peace where we have no need for weapons and countries stop engaging in war and violence.

We dare to dream and hope for bold inclusivity where homophobia and transphobia are no more, and 2SLGBTQ people can gather without fear of being shot; and go to school, or church without fear of being demonized.

We dare to dream and hope for bold discipleship where the God’s love and justice is embodied in our lives for all we meet along the way.

Today we have an opportunity to work toward one of these dreams, as those committed to ending houselessness in Regina gather to strategize toward getting the amount in the budget that the City Council asked for. In June, the City Council unanimously agreed to direct the city staff to include in the budget full operational funding to end homelessness, develop a report on the strategy, what's needed for implementation, and develop a report of the cost of doing nothing. The city staff decided to ignore this decision of Council and not put the amount in the budget, saying that the increase in the mill rate of 20% or more is too high. That may be a high increase, but city staff should not be going against the motion of Council. Are we willing to continue to let people freeze without housing? Are we willing to continue to bear the cost in other ways, as I am sure it is more costly to do nothing. Are we willing to allow a $5.3 million increase in the police budget and yet allow houselessness to continue? This afternoon there will be a drop-in strategy session from 3-7pm at Hampton Hub, to work towards making sure the amount gets back in the budget. It’s an opportunity to live out bold discipleship and daring justice.

Jesus calls us to be ready and watch for we do not know when he is coming. He may be coming again in person, or he may come in and through others we experience in our day to day living. If we are not awake, watchful and ready, we could miss it. Being ready means living faithfully, carrying out the mission and ministry of Jesus, which was love, compassion and justice especially to and with those on the edge of society, the poor, the marginalized, the orphans and widows of our time. As we move into this Advent season, may we be ready with bold dreams and hopes for peace, living out love, as we seek deep spirituality, bold discipleship and daring justice. Amen.