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St. Luke's Episcopal Church - Anchorage, Kentucky
The First Sunday of Advent - November 26 & 27, 2016
Matthew 24:36-44

Keep awake therefore, for you (we) do not know on what day your (our) Lord is coming.”

Not really a reading that many of us expected to hear on this first Sunday of Advent, is it? Thanksgiving is over and now many, if not most of us are focused upon the preponderance of Black Friday sales, mailing out Christmas cards & gifts, and adorning our homes with festive Christmas decorations. Yet, here we are presented with a gospel reading with an apocalyptic theme, which, to say the least, can be quite unsettling. After all Tis the season to be jolly! In contrast, as we observe this holy season of Advent we are reminded to “keep awake” for we do not know on what day our Lord is coming. Keep awake...

We are here physically today, but are we truly awake? Could some of us be sleepwalking in our faith? In other words, are we living our lives in the way of Christ? Is our focus on Him, or is our primary focus on the many other things vying for our attention? During this time of year, it can be especially challenging for us to not get sucked up in the vortex of living in a rushed, over-committed, and competitive world. Our spiritual focus during this season of Advent can be so easily compromised by the worldly temptations that can be incongruent with observing this time of holiness and expectation.

Now please don't get me wrong, as I am no Ebenezer Scrooge, but it is paramount that we be reminded of the significance of this Advent season, because what it really symbolizes is a time of anticipatory joy! Although the theme of 'judgement' is alluded to in Matthew's gospel account, Systematic Theology Professor and ordained minister John Burgess elucidates the underlying meaning by informing us that “A theology of the coming kingdom is most faithful to

the biblical witness when it reminds us that the Christ who judges us is also the Christ who endured judgement for our sake ; that God's judgment never contradicts or overrides God's grace; and that the readiness to which Jesus calls us is shaped not by fear of the future, but rather by gratitude for life in the kingdom that Christ's already offers us." Therefore, living between the times, we continue to give thanks to God for the Christ child, even as we plead with God while attempting to realize once and for all, the kingdom to be declared to be at hand." Keep awake...

So yes, we/Christians are living in a 'between the times' sort of realm, and we are beckoned to take pause from the business of the world in order that we may discover a keen awareness during this anticipatory season of Advent. We are reminded of the promises to Israel of Emmanuel, and God incarnate in human flesh to deliver us from sin and evil. Likewise, the Advent season calls us to anticipate the day in which Emmanuel will return as King of Kings and Lord of Lords. We are living between the times (Burgess, J. – *Feasting on the Word*). As I alluded to earlier, Advent is marked by a spirit of expectation, and by watchful alertness, as we must be ready for the Lord at any time. Keep awake...

We can blend this season of holiday festivities and celebration while concurrently revering the holy season of Advent – just as we can blend the 'between the times' realm of the Advent season. So how might we do this? Well, we can begin by taking time to check in with ourselves and do a sort of spiritual inventory to ensure that our true north is focused upon God. This will be evidenced by the way we live our lives, and how we treat others, and then ask ourselves - are we living a life of work in a spirit of wakefulness, as though Christ were to return today? Do we love our neighbors as ourselves? This can be a tall order for sure.

And if we feel we are falling short, we have an invitation to slow down. We have an invitation to step away (so to speak) to seek out silence and solitude. Henri Nouwen paraphrases

this beautifully by saying “*The fragile balance between silence and words, withdrawal and involvement, distance and closeness, solitude and community forms the basis of the Christian life and should therefore be the subject of our most personal attention.*” Therefore, let us be mindful of our life in action (which encompasses our everyday lives) and mindful of our lives in solitude, (which draws us ever closer to life in Christ).

As we observe living in the ‘between the times’ realm of Advent, we reflect upon the birth of the Christ child, while looking to the future of the return of Jesus Christ our Lord and savior. Yes, we need to keep our attentions focused on the present day and the needs of that day, and stay awake, and to remember that because of our faith we are called to do something here and now, as we do not know on what day our Lord is coming.

I would like to read you an excerpt from an Advent meditation shared by our Bishop - Terry White, which serves a holy reminder of what the Advent season is truly about:

Emmanuel, God with us, has come, and is coming again. The time is short, and until we breathe our last or the Lord returns in glory, our work is to be lived out with urgent purpose. At the Last Day, from his throne Jesus will see in the lives of those most vulnerable the depth of our faith, and he will ask: When you saw me hungry, in danger, oppressed, in need of a home, in need of hope, how did you serve me? May we take the time to step away from the business of the world and to remain watchful and awake, as living in love and service to Christ our Lord who lives and reigns now and forever. Amen.