

November 27, 2022  
First Sunday of Advent  
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No matter how much I prepare for the season of Advent, I continue to be surprised and taken a little aback at the scripture readings for this first Sunday in the season

While I am preparing for a baby born in a manger, for “Silent Night” and “Joy to the World,” this first Sunday is about another moment – a moment in the future – when Jesus will enter our lives, or rather re-enter our lives as it were, in what will be the glorious end of days

This season of Advent, of waiting and anticipation, is as much about the historic anticipation of the coming of Christ in Bethlehem as it is about our current anticipation for Christ’s second coming in Yarmouth

But, I have to admit that I hear the words of this gospel lesson today and I revert to being a child being told to make sure my room was clean before the guests arrived

It was both incentive and threat

“Make sure this mess is cleaned up before our guests get here”

“Keep awake therefore, for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming” (from the gospel text)

I’m not exactly sure if I’m supposed to be excited or terrified

I feel excited because the guests are coming!

I feel terrified because my room is a MESS and they better not be arriving soon or I am screwed!

My room is a mess – our rooms are a mess – our world is, if we're being totally honest, a little bit of a mess

And, my friends, Christ is coming – that's what Advent is about, that's what today's gospel reading is about

So is this incentive or threat? Exciting or terrifying?

I've struggled to find the word that truly describes what it is but it is none those, so much as it is an energy

Stanley Saunders, Faculty Emeritus at Columbia Theological Seminary, in Atlanta, Georgia writes that the "watchfulness or wakefulness" that Jesus "is [talking about] here [is] not a defensive or preventive posture, but [a] heightened attentiveness, attuned both to the signs of God's presence and power"<sup>1</sup>

Energy – heightened attentiveness to God's presence and power

"Keep awake therefore, for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming" (from the gospel text)

Can you feel the energy in Christ's words?

If you're still twinging with a little bit of terror and fear at these words, I understand

For far too long, a predominant interpretation of these texts in our Christian traditions has been that of threat, fear, and worse shame

"Your life, your actions, your behavior, YOU as you are are not enough and you better get into shape before Jesus comes"

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.workingpreacher.org/commentaries/revised-common-lectionary/first-sunday-of-advent/commentary-on-matthew-2436-44-6>

But, if I'm being honest, I don't think that God anticipates that we will have it all together perfectly by the time of Jesus' second coming - I don't think God expects our rooms to be totally clean

We've been reading the story Jesus refers to in the gospel passage, the story of Noah and the flood, in our Bible study and one of the last chapters we read, Chapter 8, contained God's promise, God's covenant with God's people after the flood, in which God promised not to destroy the earth again and God recognized that the perfection of behavior and relationship that God was expecting from human beings was not realistic

The authors of Genesis said it a bit more dramatically, "I will never again curse the ground because of humankind, for the inclination of the human heart is evil from youth" (Genesis 8:21)

Hits a little differently in the original text, but the concept is there

God sees us for who we are, flawed and all, and God says that is not a reason to curse this earth and bring hardship

God doesn't expect us to always get it right or to always be put together

But, I do think that Jesus hopes that we will seek to live more in alignment with the life and ministry he ventured to show us while he lived on earth

When Christ arrived on this earth as a baby, born in that manger as a true human being named Jesus, he grew up to tell his disciples and anyone who would listen that what his birth meant was the in-breaking of God's kingdom on earth

Most often, when Jesus talked about living in God's Kingdom, it wasn't something for the end times only to be enjoyed once we die but rather an invitation into a new way of living now – a new world order in which God's love reigns

And as much as God's Kingdom sounds pretty great, we do not live there...yet

We live rather imperfectly straddling the realities of our world as we know it – messy as it is – and God's Kingdom

And Jesus' message today, to “keep awake therefore, for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming” (from the gospel text) is an invitation to get uncomfortable

So long as there is a chasm between God's Kingdom where love, justice, mercy, forgiveness, and grace are the norms, where swords are beaten into ploughshares – so long as there is a chasm between that world and the world in which we live where capitalism is King and the only manipulation to firearms is to make them more deadly, then we as Christians ought to feel uncomfortable, discontent, and impatient

In just a few moments we will baptize baby Grace and welcome her into, and this may sound strange Emily and Seth, but we will welcome her into a faithful life of discomfort

Discomfort as she, like us, straddles these two realities of God's Kingdom and the world in which we live and observes that chasm, that disparity and senses that hope and possibility for something better, something more just

But we also welcome her into God's family – into a community of uncomfortable people of faith who are striving to see God's will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

So, “keep awake...for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming”

Live with a heightened attentiveness anticipating that you will see God's power and presence transforming the world

And may that holy discomfort inspire and motivate us to close that chasm as best we are able so that we might live more fully into God's kingdom

And, lest we feel ill-equipped to close such a chasm, let me reassure you have all that you need to do the task: you have God's grace and love

Many people say that they want to feel good after going to church on Sunday mornings, but I fear that if we do not leave every Sunday with even just a bit of discomfort, I wonder if we're truly letting Christ into our hearts to transform our lives

My this discomfort be to us a blessing.

Amen.