

Sermon for Sunday, December 1, 2019 - "Awake, Awake!"

First Sunday of Advent
December 1, 2019
Good Shepherd Lutheran Church
Decorah, Iowa
Rev. Amy Zalk Larson

[Click here to read scripture passages for the day.](#)

Beloved of God, grace to you and peace in the name of Jesus.

This reading would be jarring at any time, but it sounds especially dissonant as we prepare for cozy celebrations of Jesus' birth.

Instead of glad tidings of great joy we're startled by the noise of a thief in the night. Windows shatter and footsteps sound on the stairs. It's time to wake up, pay attention, take action.

This is not what we expect in December, but it's what we need for the good news of Jesus to break through to us.

The good news is not just that baby Jesus was born long ago. The good news is that, in Jesus, God broke into our world in a most unexpected way. Jesus came not with power and might but as a vulnerable baby who then lived as a peasant, ate with sinners, and died at the hands of the Empire.

He lived and loved radically, disrupting the ways of this world. The world tried to stop him and put him to death. But God disrupted even the power of death, raising Jesus from the dead.

Now Christ Jesus is alive - breaking into every aspect of our world to make all things new. One day the world will be as God longs for it to be. War, destruction and injustice will come to an end; peace and well-being will prevail for all creation.

Christ Jesus' life, death and resurrection disrupted everything - but in a sneaky, undercover way that is easy for us to miss.

We get stuck in ruts and routines, nose to the grindstone, and don't notice Christ's presence; we miss signs of God's coming new day. We get lulled to sleep by apathy and overindulgence; we settle for coziness rather than life-giving change.

So, Christ Jesus comes to us through scripture and song, bread and wine, and the gathered community to say wake up, rouse yourself, pay attention - I am doing a new thing for you, for the world.

We especially get these calls in the season of Advent.

Some advent wake up calls are quite harsh. They sound as unwelcome as a thief in the night. The Gospel reading from Matthew today is like that. It's intended to sweep us of our comfort zones. It's meant to unsettle and even uproot patterns, routines and relationships. Scriptures like this seek to

break into our lethargy and indifference to startle us to attention. Christ is disrupting the world - keep alert, be prepared.

Other scriptures in Advent function more like an alarm clock meant to rouse us to action in the morning. The passage from Romans today is like that: "You know what time it is, how it is now the moment for you to wake from sleep ... the night is far gone, the day is near. Let us then lay aside the works of darkness and put on the armor of light; let us live honorably as in the day." Scriptures like these seek to get us up and going to help bring in Christ's new day.

We need these kinds of wake up calls. Yet, if all we had were the sounds of a thief in the night or a shrill alarm clock, we could get overwhelmed. This could make us want to install a security system to be safe from God's intrusions, make us want to hide our heads under our pillows and push snooze on the alarm clock for a bit longer.

After all, our world is full of strident calls to action - of people sounding the alarm that it's well past time to rouse ourselves to address climate change, racism, violence, injustice. Sometimes these get us going. Sometimes they lead to despair.

So thankfully, other scriptures in Advent wake us in a kinder way - more like the sun pouring into our window at daybreak and falling gently upon our faces. Scriptures like our Isaiah reading today shine into our hearts with the light of God's new dawn to stir us to hope, to rouse us to joy. We hear of a great and glorious time in which nations will no longer learn war, in which swords and spears will be beaten into farm tools.

We're awakened to the promise of this new day. We're called to look forward to it and live in it's light even when we can't yet feel the full warmth of it on our faces.

And yet, whether the wake-up call is gentle or harsh, all of Advent *is* meant to bring some discomfort. It is meant to disrupt our drowsiness and move us out of our cozy resting places so that we don't miss the ways God is breaking into our world.

Advent's disruptive scriptures may not be what we want in December, but they are what we need to experience the good news of Jesus.

Advent wakes us up so that we can stand in wide-eyed wonder as hope is born at Christmas. It opens our eyes to see how God continues to come to us in unexpected, mysterious ways. It rouses us to attention, action and hope so that we can participate in God's subversive work of making all things new.

Awake, awake says God to you today. See what God is doing for you, for our world.

Let's take a moment for silent prayer.