

Sermon for Sunday, November 27, 2022
First Sunday of Advent
“Disruption!”
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Beloved People 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. Footsteps sound on the stairs. It’s time to wake up, pay attention, take action.

This isn’t what we expect in the holiday season. Yet maybe it’s what we need for the good news of Jesus to get 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.

Christ Jesus is alive, breaking into every aspect of our world to make all things new. Christ is always working to disrupt the sin and brokenness and injustice that is within and all around us and bring in God’s reign of peace and well-being. Yet, Christ works in sneaky, undercover ways. And it is not always easy to perceive what God is doing. There is so much that gets in the way.

We can get overwhelmed by floods of despair and fear as we see this country, families and communities torn apart in these difficult days. We can get stuck in ruts and routines, nose to the grindstone, and miss Christ’s presence. We can get lulled to sleep by apathy and overindulgence, settling for coziness rather than life-giving change. It can be hard to see and respond to what God is doing. So Jesus comes to us, again and again, 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 out 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 its light even when we can't yet feel the warmth of it on our faces.

This sunlight can feel so distant as bombs explode in Ukraine, as mass shooting deaths continue to mount. Yet it is there for us. And we desperately need the light of these promises. We need them to show us the path and guide our steps forward so that we can live differently in a violent world. We need to be assured that God is doing this and we are called to join. It isn't all up to us. This is God's work. As we walk in these ways, we are healed and we help creation to heal.

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.

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

Let's take a moment for silent prayer.