

Sermon for Sunday, December 3, 2023

First Sunday of Advent

“Awake To God’s Dream”

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

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

There are parts of scripture that feel like Jesus is encouraging us to be insomniacs. Keep awake, he tells us twice in our Gospel reading today. Keep watch, keep alert, you don’t want to be asleep on the job at evening, midnight, cockcrow or dawn. Umm, thanks Jesus, many of us have enough trouble sleeping already these days. How long can I claim to be messed up by the end of daylight savings time?

Of course, Jesus isn’t literally prescribing a sleep hygiene routine. He’s calling us to be attentive and aware of God’s eternal reign of justice and peace that is breaking into our world. God’s eternal reign is God’s dream for this world. So, in Advent, even as we’re called to keep awake, we’re also asked to be attentive to dreams. We’re called to step into the mystery and awe of God’s dreams and pray that they shape our reality.

In Advent, we hear from people who were shaped by God’s dreams. The prophets, the psalmists, John the Baptist, Zechariah, Elizabeth, Mary, Joseph, and the Magi—all were dreamers. Some of these folks were given dreams while they slept, others while awake. Yet they all received, discovered, and responded to God’s dreams for the world.

When has a dream shaped your reality? Maybe you’ve awoken from a nightmare that has lingered with you for hours or even days to come. Maybe you’ve dreamt music would play a large role in your life, so have studied, practiced and joined an ensemble to make that dream happen. Recently, I had a dream about Good Shepherd and this time of transition that has brought me deep peace. I was walking away from you going to preach at another congregation one Sunday. All of a sudden, I realized that I’d forgotten to line up pulpit supply, but people just stepped up to share their many gifts and worship was glorious. I could tell because I was watching it on YouTube while walking. Then I found myself entering a house and calmly helping a family to move into a new home. I awoke with a profound sense that this congregation would thrive in years to come and that my family and I would also thrive.

That dream has sustained me in all the emotions and tasks involved with making a big life change. It has given me such hope for us all. In Advent, God’s people are given big, outrageous, hopeful dreams. Dreams of God tearing open the heavens to come near and address the brokenness of the world, of God’s face shining upon us and restoring us, of Jesus returning to bring God’s justice. We’re given visions of low places lifted, rough places made plain, a path cleared for God to come to all people, the lowly lifted up and tyrants toppled.

Sometimes these Advent passages are interpreted as nightmarish warnings: Jesus is coming, be afraid, be very afraid. Yet the whole of scripture shows us that God’s dreams are profoundly lov-

ing and hopeful. Peace and justice will kiss; God will dwell among us; we will live in deep connection with God, all creation, and one another. This is God's promised future for the whole cosmos. That's why the strange Gospel passage from Mark today is such good news. It gives us a vision that the brokenness of this world is not our final reality. Trials and tribulations are not the end. Jesus is coming to make all things new, to bring God's dreams into fullness.

These visions, these Advent dreams, can sustain us through tumultuous times. We pray to be shaped by them in how we live each day, how we use our gifts, how we spend, how we vote, how we show up for others in our community, our nation, our world. We also get to keep awake and pay attention to the ways Jesus is already present with us, already birthing God's eternal reign of justice and peace. God is born among us as the baby Jesus. Jesus is present in word, water, song, bread and wine, wherever two or three are gathered in his name, and in those the world considers last and least. God is present when we wake in the night, when we're haunted by nightmares, in times of change, when grief presses in, when loneliness stalks.

Together this Advent we will dream, and we will keep awake.
We will hope and act and serve in ways shaped by God's dream.
We will pray, ***stir up your power and come***, even as God is already so very present to us.

Let's take a moment for silent prayer.