

“Keep Awake”

A sermon by Reverend Alice Marcrum
1st Sunday of Advent, 2005

Like an alarm clock rudely waking us from a sound sleep, the apocalyptic scripture readings for today alert us to the coming of the End of the World as we know it. The First Sunday of Advent has arrived with all of its breathless wonder and expectation. While the media and the stores tempt us to shop till we drop for Christmas Day will soon be here and we must get those bargains while we can; our hearts want to rush to the manger for a moment of solace during the busiest time of the year. But before we can enter into the humble stable to gaze upon the Christ Child, we must first face our own inadequacies and the fleetingness of life itself.

As we read the appeals to God by the prophet Isaiah for God to come out of hiding and reveal Himself to the nations in great power and might, we are faced with the reality of the secularism that has hidden the true meaning of Christmas. No longer is it considered acceptable in our society to wish strangers “A Merry Christmas!” Instead we are encouraged by the secular media and our children are encouraged in the schools to say only “Happy Holidays!” lest the very mention of Christmas offend someone. We should have seen it coming when the letter X replaced Christ in Christmas, but we let it pass thinking it only a fad. Now Christmas is out, except for the constant reminder by the media and stores of how many days are left to purchase those gifts and send those cards before it is too late.

We Christians, who were the first to celebrate the birth of the precious Son of God into the world, have been sleeping while the secular world took Christmas from us. We have kept quiet while the secular world removed the manger scenes even those displayed next to signs of other religions. We have not spoken out when the schools’ “Christmas Songs” were replaced with “Holiday Songs” that did not even hint of the Lord of Lords’ humble birth that was heralded by a choir of angels. Now we are politically incorrect if we wish the store clerk from whom we just bought our Christmas presents a “Merry Christmas!” The meaning of Christmas has become a secret known only by those who worship the Christ Child born in a manger so long ago.

Yet the author of the gospel of Mark cries out to us this day to ***“Keep awake”*** for the Christ Child who was born of humble birth is returning with ***“great power and glory”***. No longer a child, but as a triumphant Savior, He will ***“gather His elect from the four winds, from the ends of the earth to the ends of heaven”***. Although we, as Christians, have not been faithful in sharing the true meaning of Christmas to a dying hurting world that is spiritually bankrupt, the Christ Child remains faithful to us. He has promised to return and unite us forever with Him.

My question for today is “Are we ready?” If Jesus were to return today, this very moment, would we be ready? The apocalyptic scene that Mark describes for us is not

very inviting. It is the climatic end of a series of terrible events including times of great persecution for the Church. As if that is not enough pain and agony, Mark writes, ***“Jesus said to his disciples, ‘In those days, after that suffering, the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will be falling from heaven, and the powers in the heavens will be shaken.’”*** If we digest these ominous words and really listen to them, we are faced with a world of total darkness that is being bombarded by falling stars. For those of us who have lived through the wrath of hurricanes, they pale in comparison with the end times pictured by Mark. If God does not shorten this intense destructive end of all end times, then even those who are followers of Christ will be completely decimated.

Yet, there is hope for those who remain faithful to Christ. When all these terrible things are taking place, Almighty God sends us His only Begotten Son to rescue the faithful both dead and alive. Mark writes, ***“Then they will see ‘the Son of Man coming in clouds’ with great power and glory. Then he will send out the angels, and gather his elect from the four winds, from the ends of the earth to the ends of heaven.”*** All who have believed and remained faithful will be saved by the only Savior of the world, Jesus the Christ. The angels who sang the first Christmas song about the birth of the Savior will now be sent by the same Savior to gather together all who believe.

Brothers and sisters in Christ, this is incredible news. Do you realize that we know the only One who can save people from a destruction of such magnitude? The meaning of Christmas begins with the end of all things as we know it. This is how God works. Before God can create something new and uncorrupted, the corrupted must be put to death.

God the Father sent His Son Jesus into the world to redeem the world through His death. Only the blood sacrifice of the Son of God in the form of a human being could put to death the old order of a fallen world filled with sin. The beginning of the end of this fallen world began when the Son of God came into this world as the Christ Child. The redemption of all humanity was paid on the cross, yet the fullness of this redemption will not be completed until this old world of corruption has passed away. Only then will those who have freely received the gift of salvation through Jesus the Christ will truly know the fullness of what it means to be in Christ as new creatures.

St. Paul writes in his letter to the Corinthians, ***“For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then we will see face to face. Now I know only in part; then I will know fully, even as I have been fully known.”*** When that which is corrupt has passed away, then we will enter into the fullness of Christ. This is the secret meaning of Christmas that we have been commanded to share with everyone.

God does not want anyone to spiritually perish, instead He desires that when the end of the world comes, all will be saved through His Son Jesus the Christ. We have an awesome task before us. It is up to us to share the good news of Jesus with everyone. So let us begin this First Sunday of Advent with a renewed heart and dedication to proclaim throughout this season to all with whom we come in contact that Jesus came into the

world as Savior for all humanity. And may I be so bold as to suggest that we dare to say to the store clerk and others we meet not the politically correct “Happy Holidays”, but a joyful “Merry Christmas!” I know that this goes against the grain of the waiting season of Advent, but it is time that we as Christians began reclaiming Christmas for Christ!

The alarm clock is ringing. It is time to wake up and spread the good news. Christmas is only twenty-nine days away. In the words of our Lord as written in Mark, ***“Therefore, keep awake---for you do not know when the master of the house will come, in the evening, or at midnight, or at cockcrow, or at dawn or else he may find you asleep when he comes suddenly. And what I say to you I say to all: Keep awake.”***