

Meadowbrook Congregational Church

“Wake Up”

November 27, 2011

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Mark 13: 24-37

24 'But in those days, after that suffering,

the sun will be darkened,

and the moon will not give its light,

²⁵ and the stars will be falling from heaven,

and the powers in the heavens will be shaken.

²⁶ Then they will see “the Son of Man coming in clouds” with great power and glory.

²⁷ 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.

28 'From the fig tree learn its lesson: as soon as its branch becomes tender and puts forth its leaves, you know that summer is near. ²⁹ So also, when you see these things taking place, you know that he is near, at the very gates. ³⁰ Truly I tell you, this

generation will not pass away until all these things have taken place. ³¹ Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.

32 'But about that day or hour no one knows, neither the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. ³³ Beware, keep alert; for you do not know when the time will come.

³⁴ It is like a man going on a journey, when he leaves home and puts his slaves in charge, each with his work, and commands the doorkeeper to be on the watch.

³⁵ 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, ³⁶ or else he may find you asleep when he comes suddenly. ³⁷ And what I say to you I say to all: Keep awake.'

How many of you ventured out to do some shopping on Black Friday? How many of you went shopping at 12:01 a.m. on Friday? I hope that you all found the bargains and items that you were looking for. I heard that there were a number of people camping out at Best Buy beginning on Tuesday morning, just to get some great electronic deals at midnight on Black Friday. Supposedly, there are a few electronic items on everyone's list. These items include the Amazon Kindle Fire, the Microsoft Kinect, and the Sony Move. The last two items are gaming devices I believe. I read where it is anticipated that these items will be in short supply this Christmas. I am amazed that even in the age of internet shopping there are lots of people who stand in line for hours, struggling to stay awake, with lawn chairs and sleeping bags, waiting for the stores to open on Black Friday.

Soon after we got married and before our children came along, Laura and I decided to rescue a beagle mix puppy from the shelter. We took her home and named

her Chelsea. Chelsea then proceeded to tear up the kitchen linoleum, a couple pair of Laura's shoes, and most of the draperies of the church parsonage. But we loved her anyway. And Chelsea really loved Laura. Around 4:00 p.m. each workday afternoon, Chelsea would hop onto the back of the couch and sit in a position where she could stare out upon the driveway. She wanted to be ready for the moment that Laura's car would pull in. Chelsea would not move from this spot until Laura arrived home from work. She would then run to the door, squeal with delight, leap up and down with joy, and greet her beloved "Mom."

One summer, Laura decided to take an extended bike trip. She was gone for about a week. At 4:30 p.m. the first day, Chelsea took her spot on the back of the couch. When Laura did not return, Chelsea remained vigilant. She refused to move. She didn't want to leave to eat so I tried to feed her at the spot where she waited. I had to physically carry her outside to do her business and then she quickly returned to her watch post. I started to worry about her, even contemplating a call to the veterinarian. But finally the day arrived for Laura's return. Chelsea was at her spot, spying the car in the driveway long before I did. Rest assured there was a festival of great canine joy when she celebrated the long awaited return of her "Mom" that day.

I often think of Chelsea on this particular Sunday of the year. Her patient and loyal waiting seems to me the perfect Advent example. She waited faithfully. She stayed awake to the situation. She did not get discouraged. She remained alert to possibilities. And when the moment came, she recognized it and celebrated it in all of its fullness. Yes, if a dog can teach you something, Chelsea taught me a great deal about what Advent is all about.

The reading for the first Sunday in Advent is words of expectation from the gospel of Mark. Jesus is giving a long speech and he concludes with some rather strong words and vivid images. God is about to act. The sun will be darkened. The moon will not give light. The stars will fall. The heavens will be shaken. The coming of God will bring change. These changes will come very soon. Watch! Be alert! Be on guard! Stay awake! Nothing is to be taken for granted. God could come at anywhere and at anytime.

Three times in this morning's reading Jesus says, "Keep alert" or "Keep awake." This is the same word the Jesus used when he spoke to Peter and James and John in the Garden of Gethsemane, asking them to stay awake with him for just one hour. Stay awake! Keep your eyes open. Watch with me and for me. Stay alert in the present moment.

If the Christmas season is anything, it is predictable. Each year we do the same things because we have gotten used to it this time of year. We put up the tree. We put up lights outside. We bake. We shop. We prepare a Christmas card or email. We plan or attend seasonal social events. We might approach these tasks like we do a cross country drive. Our minds are on the destination. The tasks of waiting that come before then become monotonous, meaningless, and tiresome. We don't really expect anything new to happen because of what we do. We are prone to fall asleep to possibility.

Perhaps that is the way all of life is. We get wrapped up in our obligations, complacent in our comfort, isolated in seeking our own needs and desires. Things become so ordinary that we don't look for the extraordinary. We hardly expect anything

cosmos-shaking to occur in our next breath. We fall prey to compromise. We settle for the profane instead of seeking the holy. We fall asleep to God.

Or perhaps we simply want to fall asleep. Given the awful and anxious nature of our world, sleep is sometimes an escape from the worry, the uncertainty, and the responsibility. If we are asleep, we don't have to deal with things.

But whether our sleep is caused by apathy, boredom, or lack of expectations, Jesus says to us today, "Stay awake!" Be in this moment. God is coming. God will act. Maybe tomorrow. Maybe in your next breath. Maybe God is already here. And God's coming will bring you something you desperately need, something that you long for, something that can change your world.

This season is a reminder for the faithful to stay awake, to keep watch, and to not abandon the work of God in your lives. Whatever life brings you now, pay attention to it. If it is joy, share it with sincere thanksgiving. If it is pain, lean into it and be honest about your need to be healed. If it is fear, bring it to the light that can overcome the darkness. If it is worry, act upon that which you can control and allow God room to move. Open your eyes and wake up to a reality that while not fully present, has begun to appear. Wake up to what is happening. Wake up to the presence of God.