

PSALM 80:1-7; 17-19

Give ear, O Shepherd of Israel, you who lead Joseph like a flock! You who are enthroned upon the cherubim, shine forth before Ephraim and Benjamin and Manasseh. Stir up your might, and come to save us!

Restore us, O God; let your face shine, that we may be saved.

O Lord God of hosts, how long will you be angry with your people's prayers? You have fed them with the bread of tears, and given them tears to drink in full measure. You make us the scorn of our neighbors; our enemies laugh among themselves.

Restore us, O God of hosts; let your face shine, that we may be saved....

But let your hand be upon the one at your right hand, the one whom you made strong for yourself. Then we will never turn back from you; give us life and we will call on your name.

Restore us, O God of hosts; let your face shine, that we may be saved.

MARK 13:24-37

But 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. 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.

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. So also, when you see these things taking place, you know that he is near, at the very gates. Truly I tell you, this generation will not pass away until all these things have taken place. Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.

But about that day or hour no one knows, neither the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but

only the Father. Beware, keep alert for you do not know when the time will come. 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 door keeper to be on the watch. Therefore, keep awake—for you do not know when the master of the house will come, in the evening, or at midnight, or at cockcrows, 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!

WOKE YET? (Advent)

Psalm 80:1-7:17-19
Mark 13:24-37

We stand this morning at the brink of something—is it the edge of a new dawn breaking through the dark horizons of our world infested with a deadly virus; or is it the trailhead of a bitter journey through a forest of sorrow and tears leading into a bottomless abyss? The Gospel of Mark flies the red storm warning flag: *But 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.* And the Psalmist over and over lifts his eyes to the heavens and pleads for redemption: *Restore us, O God of hosts; let your face shine, that we may be saved.*

Advent begins today on a sobering note and if you will pardon the pun, it is pregnant with meaning. For as we prepare for the birth of the Christ Child, we are also poignantly and anxiously awaiting the next events in our nation's life which will go a long way in shaping what our futures will look like. We are all wondering...and worrying.

If we have any sense of history at all, we should understand that nothing stands still in annals of humanity. It is continually in forward motion like a vehicle that has no reverse gear. There is an innate drive to evolve that is built upon the dreams of its people. But for every

advancement, there are always obstacles of fear, hesitancy and the impulse to slam on the breaks standing in the way. “This is too scary! Let’s return to how life was before.”

And yet, the energy propelling humanity forward is impossible to overcome. Because whether or not we are consciously paying attention to it, we are all seeking a deeper connection with God. We long to change the world in ethical and moral ways. We don’t want to see people hungry and homeless. We don’t want to fight with each other over virtually everything and divide ourselves into camps and dig trenches between us and cover our ears so that we never have to listen to what the “others” are saying. We don’t like any of this and we have visions of how life could be different. And we have dreams about what that would be like.

But how do we get there? Our theme for Advent this year is “Those Who Dream.” And what is dreaming? It is imagination unfettered by obstacles. In our dreams, we can fly; we can tirelessly run up mountains and restore our youth. In our dreams, no one tells us, “You can’t do this.” Boundaries simply melt away. Dreams pick us up out of the confines and miseries of the present allowing us to soar over the top of them. It can be winter outside and summer in our dreams. After Mark sends out his warning of things to come, he shares the turning point of his vision: *Then they will see the Son of Man coming in clouds with great power and glory.*

The task before us is bridging that gap between dreaming and reality. At some point, we must wake up and then we quickly remember that we are no longer capable of running up mountains; or flying; and there is a snowstorm raging outside of our windows. We may have dreamt of a world of peace, harmony and happiness; but upon awaking that dream is shattered by reports of a thousand new deaths from the virus; another police shooting of an unarmed Black man; unfounded conspiracy theories; ice storms, snowstorms, wildfires...let’s go back to sleep and dream some more!

But sleeping more is not what Mark writes. No: *And what I say to you I say to all: Keep awake! For you do not know when the master of the house will come...or else he may*

find you asleep when he arrives. So the challenge before us is indeed walking across that bridge between our dreaming and reality. And that task requires us to be wide awake—to be Woke in the new vernacular. While God may speak to us through our dreams, our task is one of action.

It is a collective endeavor. It is a call to the church. If John Lewis had crossed that Bridge in Selma by himself, no one would have noticed. No one would have cared. There would have been no changes as a result. Bringing dreams into reality requires many people working together to force change to happen. As John Lennon said, “A dream you dream alone is only a dream. A dream you dream together is reality.”

Being Woke is becoming conscious. Awakening happens inside of us. Advent is a heart event. It is a spiritual event that moves us to an emerging awareness of where God wants us to direct our energy in building the Kingdom on earth. Nobody can do this by themselves. Each person who becomes Woke adds to the strength of the movement. When events happen that call us to action, we have to be awake to recognize them. *Be aware, keep alert for you do not know when the time will come.*

Dr. Marcia Riggs, Professor of Christian Ethics at Columbia Theological Seminary puts it like this: “Being woke means being aware of, enraged by, and willing to protest in solidarity with people who are pushed to the margins of society because of system oppression manifested as racism, sexism, heterosexism, homophobia, transphobia, xenophobia—any and all forms of objectification and dehumanization we enact upon one another.” That is a powerful statement. It is ethical, it is moral, it is political. It is inclusive of all aspects of our living together.

You cannot compartmentalize your faith to worshipping on Sunday morning. It has to be larger than that. The church is in the world, not separate from it. We are in a continuous battle with the megalomaniac forces of evil which have every bit as much power in their collective effort to marginalize everyone else to pursue their ambitions to create an elitist society that serves their narcissistic needs and theirs alone.

We have lit the first Advent Candle this morning as a symbol of the light that God wants to bring to the world. It is a reminder that darkness has no reality of its own. There is only darkness where there is no light. Light alone is the only true reality. We keep that light alive with our dreams of a better and more just future for all of humanity. And together, we spread that light throughout the world in our collective engagement with the Truth.

Restore us, O God of hosts; let your face shine that we may be saved.

Reverend Thomas Dunlap November 29, 2020