

Keep awake! For you do not know on what day your Lord is coming! These are the words we hear today, as we start a new church year, with this beautiful Advent season as we're getting ready for Christmas. Keep awake! For you do not know on what day your Lord is coming! Hmmm... Why is this the message of first Advent Sunday and what do these words really mean for our everyday living?

You probably all know that the word Advent means coming, from Latin *adventus*. And yes it kind of makes sense that we're talking about coming couple weeks before Christmas, for Christmas is the time when Christ has come, born into this world, as the babe of Bethlehem, to be one of us, to live a life of a human, to love us, to show us the way, to teach us, to live for us, and to die for us and our sins. We are familiar with the story, and yes we are getting ready to remember these miraculous events of Christmas morning.

But what do words keep awake, for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming mean? These verses direct our attention to Christ's second coming. We know that when Christ after his resurrection ascended to heaven and his disciples were looking up watching him go, they were approached by angels who said, "*Why do you stand looking up toward heaven? This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven.*" We have a promise that Jesus will come again, to restore his kingdom. And the prophet Isaiah indicates what that kingdom will be like when he says, "*He shall judge between the nations, and shall arbitrate for many peoples; they shall beat their swords into ploughshares, and their spears into pruning-hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more.*" Well especially witnessing the events that are happening on the Korean peninsula or Afghanistan, we know that we're not in this time of peace yet. As you think about your relationships with your loved ones, or your neighbors, you know that we're not yet in this time of peace. (Pause) And so we anticipate the second coming of the Messiah, the coming that will restore the perfect peace on earth. And while doing so we're instructed to keep awake, to be ready, for we do not know the day.

So once again the question is what do we do? Let's look at our readings for they give us some hints. Often times when we hear these words... be ready, keep awake we understand them

in the legalistic way. You know like to keep awake you must be good, you must do no wrong, so that when Christ comes, you're not caught breaking his commandments. This would be a good way to look at these verses if it would be in our ability not to sin. But the Apostle Paul in his letter to Romans says, *for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.* And so what should we do? Well Isaiah says, *"Come, let us walk in the light of the Lord."* (Pause) Being ready means to walk in the light of the Lord! I read in one amazing book about prayer that the author when he meditates, he circles himself with light. For he says, *"This light is the shield of God's presence which the evil one cannot penetrate."* And Isaiah says, let us walk in this light of the Lord, and in Romans we read today, *"Let us then lay aside the works of darkness and put on the armor of light, let us live honorably as in the day..."*

It is fairly simple to concentrate on the things that we should do, rather than on the things we should not be doing. For what will truly matter when Christ comes, is what we have done, not what we haven't done. Jesus says to those on the judgment day, *"For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you gave me clothing, etc. ..."* Have you ever thought about these verses, Jesus is basically saying, I'm encountering you daily, through people around you, your loved ones, your friends, even the strangers in the supermarket or on the street. And so what does it mean to be ready for the coming of the Lord? It means to be ready for our neighbor in need. Apostle Paul says, *"Love your neighbor as yourself, for love does not wrong to a neighbor."* (Pause)

You think we can do this, this Advent season? Let me rephrase that, do you think, we can do this every day of our lives? (Pause) Be ready, keep awake, so that you don't miss an opportunity to reach out with love to those around you! Don't miss an opportunity to approach each other with forgiveness and reconciliation! Be patient with our family members and friends with our neighbors! Can we be ready to do all these things?

It is not an easy thing. It'll take a lot of concentration and we'll need help. I told you the story this summer how I walked with Jakub and Anna to Snoqualmie Falls and we ran across a bear family. We weren't ready for such an encounter. We were new to Washington, we didn't know what to expect. Even though there were signs every hundred feet saying, *Beware! Bear activity on the path.* What I didn't tell you is that I walked that very same path couple other

times after we saw bears there, and guess what, (pause) I still wasn't ready. I had nothing on me, I just kind of hoped we won't see any bears this time. But that's how we live our lives, were not ready, we're not keeping awake, we just kind of hope that things will go smoothly and we won't have to deal with anything unexpected. But then life throws us a couple of punches and left hooks and we react in anger, and we say things we don't mean, and we hurt each other or on the other hand we don't help where it's needed. For we were caught off guard.

But the message of today's Gospel is, *Keep awake, walk in the light, lay aside works of darkness, live honorably, put on the Lord Jesus Christ.* Put on the Lord Jesus Christ and I can guarantee you that you'll be ready, and if not at least you'll know that he'll be there to lift you up, to shield you with his light, to protect you with his love, to give you strength. (pause) In this Advent season, as we're getting ready for the coming of our Lord, let us start practicing something new, let us start putting on the Lord Jesus Christ as we begin our day, let us shield ourselves with his light, and let us walk in this light, so that when the Lord comes in an unexpected hour we might be ready for him.

Amen