

Suddenly (Wake!)

Texts: Isaiah 2:1-5

Romans 13:11-14 (Series A, 1st Sunday of Advent) Ps. 122

Matthew 24:36-44

Let us pray:

It was Monday January 27, 1986, my last year in theological Seminary education in Saskatoon. The whole nation was getting ready. It was going to be a special time in the life of America. All eyes were glued to the television sets.

It was going to be the all time greatest space travel of humankind. Scientists, engineers, radio and television reporters etc. were there. It was one of the most exciting days in American history.

Students as well as professors, we were all glued to the television set in the student launch in anticipation of this historic moment. We waited and waited, and suddenly there was an ignition of all that power and the rocket shot high into the air, high, high, and higher into the air.

Only one minute in flight, and *suddenly*, the rocket exploded, and our dreams exploded; and our hopes exploded. The astronauts' families, at the airbase, and millions of Americans witnessed the world's worst space disaster live on TV.

Suddenly, there came a river of tears. Jesus said, "And so shall it be at the end of history. It will come *suddenly* like a thief in the night; like a snare; like a trap that snaps shut. So quickly.

It happened near Naples, Italy. It happened sixty miles from Naples, Italy. There was a little Italian town by a name that sounds like Bowlwana. It was located in an earthquake zone.

In 1930, fourteen hundred people were killed in a massive earthquake in that same town. Earlier in 1908, 123,000 people were killed in earthquakes in that region of the world. Yes, I said, 123,000 died. All the seismologists said, "Be alert. Be ready. You are a fool to live here. You are living in a major earthquake zone.

And then suddenly, like the sound of a snap, unexpectedly, an earthquake hit 6.8 on the Richter scale. Within thirty minutes, 1400 people had died. Yes, they knew it was coming but it happened so...*suddenly*. Jesus said, "So will it be with you at the end of time. I will come like a thief in the night; like a trap that snaps shut, suddenly, quickly and you won't be expecting it at all.

It was normal day as usual on September 11, 2009, people were going about their business as usual work, meetings, making deals etc. It happened so suddenly. They weren't expecting it. When terrorists flew two aircrafts into the Trade Centre in New York city..... when the dust settled thousands perished.... Jesus said, "And so the end will come suddenly, unexpectedly, like a thief in the night; like a trap that snaps shut. So quickly.

It is with these gloomy images that we approach the gospel lesson for the *First Sunday of Advent*. The theme for the First Sunday of Advent is always this: be ready, *be alert*, be ready at all times to meet your God because suddenly, the end of all history is going to be here.

The invitation for you and me today is to be ready, is to be ready at all times, to meet God face to face. You see, there was a problem in the early church and there were so many people who "weren't ready."

In my mind, there were two groups of people in those early Christian days and even Christians today. They were the "here and now Christians" and the "here and now unbelievers (pagans)."

First, the "*here and now Christians*." Lived only for today and took no thought for tomorrow. They were busy and lived primarily for the things of this life. They were so busy they didn't have time to think about tomorrow and even less about the end of history.

These "*here and now*" felt young; they had never been sick a day in their lives; and death seemed far away. They thought, "Eat, drink and be merry for tomorrow is another day to eat, drink and be merry and do what you want to do. There is no final judgment."

Then, there is a second group of people. I call these the “*here and now unbelievers*.” They believe there is no God; there is no heaven; not hell; no end of the world; the world always was and the world always will be. It is no longer, “Eat, drink and be merry; it is eat, drink and do what ever you want to do.

You have only one time around. Live it to the fullest. There is no moral law with moral retribution. Then, suddenly both groups died, and suddenly both groups met face to face with God.

The gospel for today is an invitation for you and me to live with a sense of *readiness*; that we are ready to meet God face to face, either or tomorrow. What are some qualities of this *readiness* I am talking about? I will briefly mention four:

The first is this: to live with *the assurance of salvation* that I am a child of God, that you are a child of God, that if I died today, that if you died today, that you would know for sure, without a trace of doubt, that you will be with Jesus Christ.

This readiness is a *confidence, an assurance, an awareness* that God is gracious, that I am a child of God, that God truly knows me by name. That my salvation does not rest on my good behavior, my good theology, or my good denominational pedigree. None of these. But one thing I know for sure that I am a child of God, I am saved by grace and loved eternally by God.

I think of the thief on the cross. Jesus said to him, “*Today you will be with me in paradise.*” It’s done. No works righteousness. Nothing he can do. No religious pedigree. Pure grace. And God says that to us as well, “*Today you will be with me in paradise.*”

A second quality: of this readiness to meet God is to be a *person of love*. To be a person of love is, love all people family, your closest friends, as well as strangers in our midst and those in need. To have this sense of readiness: is to be a person of love. It is an attribute we all encourage to strife for.

A third quality: of this readiness is to do *the job*. To do the tasks that God has given us to do. I am a member of the human race of about eight billion people I am a caretaker of this planet earth. And my sisters / brother’s keeper.

Plus, I have many more jobs and roles that I haven't mentioned but that God wants me to do. To live with a sense of readiness is to do my jobs; with integrity, and a sense of pride.

To do it in such a way that when God sees me tomorrow, God will say, "well done son, well done daughter." To live your life in such a way that God would be proud of the way that you and I are living our lives.

The *fourth quality* of this sense of *readiness* to meet God is to *be loyal to the values of Jesus Christ*. To be loyal to a sense of love, justice and compassion, to always have a special concern and action for the poor, weak, to defending the defense-less.

As Paul also reminds us in this week's excerpt from the *Letter to the Romans*, "Let us then lay aside the works of darkness and put on the armor of light...live honorably..." With Christ as our *armor of light*, hope is more than fantasy. **Hope** shines on the path ahead and propels us toward the House of God. Get busy, prepare yourself. Jesus is coming!

Advent is a season of preparation for the Nativity of Jesus through repentance and joyful expectation. Advent is *a time for judging the choices we make* for living our lives. This season is a ritual moment for confronting discomfoting truths. It catches us in the act of living unconnected from the Gospel...

It would appear that a little refreshment of our conversion is in order. As Jesus reminds us *that day and hour no one knows...Therefore you must also be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an unexpected hour*.

Finally, who is this passage of Scripture addressed to today? It must be for the old people, everyone who is sixty and over, or on pension or in a nursing home or getting ready to die. Those people think more about mortality and death; these Bible verses are for them.

I don't think so. Life changes so quickly. Life is short, the totality of life moves by so quickly. ... I look at an infant, and the infant today is a two year old tomorrow. And you blink and the child is thirteen.

And you blink again, where did time go, and the child is now a young adult. I blink my eyes again and is now married. I blink my eyes again and you have children. I blink my eyes again and those children are gone and you have an empty nest. I blink my eyes again and you are a widow or widower. I blink my eyes again and you are ready to die. That's the way life is. That's the way life is, my friends.

Who is this passage for? It is for all of us because it is life, life moves so quickly, doesn't it? ...I was a baby and suddenly I was two years old; and then suddenly, I was ten, growing up in Accra, Ghana. And before I knew it, I was twenty three in collage in Germany; suddenly I was twenty-five in Vejen in Denmark, and then at thirty-six a pastor in Herbert, Saskatchewan.

Suddenly, I was fifty – a pastor in Montreal, Quebec. Suddenly there was an explosion in the sky and the astronauts were gone; and suddenly there was an earthquake and 1400 people were gone; suddenly, the man was so healthy today and gone tomorrow.

In this Advent, *now is the moment to wake* and discover the faith choices we have yet to make now, for as Jesus reminds us *that day and hour no one knows...Therefore you must also be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an unexpected hour.*

Suddenly, all of life happens to suddenly, doesn't it? And Jesus said to all people of all ages, the end will come so suddenly; live today as if you were going to meet God face to face tomorrow. Jesus is coming!

**May the peace of God which passes all understanding
keep our heart and mind,
as we journey through the season of Advent.**

Amen.

November 27, 2022