

“A Wakeup Call”
1st in Advent Series on Belief
Mark 13: 24-37
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Pepsi has had a commercial out that some of you may have seen for their high caffeine version of their drink called Pepsi Max. You may have seen it where people are having trouble staying awake and they drink Pepsi Max and then they are full of energy and raring to go, almost annoying other people around them. Then the commercial ends with someone shouting “Wake Up People!” Pepsi like other soft drink companies, are marketing towards our caffeine addictions but also our other addiction to stay active. Sleep in our society today is a forgotten necessity and in the quest to be ever more productive in our lives we sacrifice more and more. So we need these types of seemingly harmless things to keep awake.

Now what does this have to do with Advent, what does this have to do with anything at all in religion or the church? Good question I’m glad you asked. Throughout the year I believe, as it was in time that we often times walk around spiritually asleep. Now statistics would say that we are a more spiritual society than we have been in a long time. And in one degree that is true. Many people have a longing and a desire for something more than this world or this life, but it does not reflect necessarily in church involvement or attendance, but it sure does sell a lot of books. Today in the first Sunday of Advent we are to begin preparing ourselves for what is to come. To watch, to wait, and to be alert for what is to come. Keep awake! Advent is a spiritual wake up call. We are to be on alert for the coming of Christ. Many of our spiritual seekers have come already looking for something while others we will see on Christmas Eve, but all of us throughout the year are called to be prepared to encounter the living Christ who is among us.

I think the problem is that many of us tend to worship the God who is the cosmic other. But do we believe and follow an incarnate God, who created the world and all that is in it and called it good, that is active and present among us? Hard to say. But for many that is not the case. The issue is we want to believe, but for some reason we just cannot fully accept it even when it is right in front of us. Lets take a look at another example of believing, yes it’s a little hokey, but I think the message is clear.

Clip from the Polar Express

For many of us this is a crucial time. We need to believe that Christ is here, but we don’t necessarily recognize the signs. We go on spiritually asleep or at least

spiritually weary, waiting for that grand moment when the train shows up and even then as we see we can often be like the little boy who is skeptical.

The call for us is to always be awake. We never truly know, as Jesus tells us when that will come. I believe that we have the opportunity to encounter Christ each and every day. The two questions that follow up that belief, is do we know when we have and then do we believe it. We have and will encounter Christ in the people that we meet, the people that we serve, and no matter if it is in a shopping mall or at work. We have encountered Christ in our worship together. We encounter Christ in the busyness of the advent season. But do others encounter Christ when they encounter you? Advent is a season of hope and an opportunity for all of us to believe. But to come to believe also means that we must keep awake. The signs are all around us. Pay attention to those signs and wonders, which will be different for everyone, but still the same God. Let's live our lives each day as if we have encountered Christ. And that means we live lives of hope. That hope of the presence of Christ can transform even the hardest of hearts.

I believe that is many begin to look at church again this time of year. A wake up call has been issued to many, and so we all come seeking, not really expecting to find anything, but with the hope that we might. But that experience of the presence of Christ may be powerful in December but it can quickly fade. We can fall back to sleep, we can become complacent.

In *A Community of Character*, Stanley Hauerwas ties hope with the virtue of patience. "Hope without patience results in the illusion of optimism or, more terrifying, the desperation of fanaticism. The hope necessary to initiate us into the adventure must be schooled by patience if the adventure is to be sustained. Through patience, we learn to continue hope, even though our hope seems to offer little chance of fulfillment." But Hauerwas notes that patience also requires hope, "... for without hope, patience too easily accepts the world and the self for what it is, rather than what it can or should be."

What we also must remember as we gather here and at the many other places for celebration is that Christ is with us. But when it comes down to it we also ask, what's in it for me. The issue here is that Christianity is not an individual sport it is a team sport. It is together where we can make our connections with God, where we learn from one another, and when we share in our lives together we trust that we will also keep each other awake so that we might recognize the Christ within us even as we prepare ourselves to recognize the Christ outside of us.

So let us keep awake this advent season and as we receive the bread and we drink from the cup, may we be awakened to a new sense of reality where recognize his presence here today, but carry that with us to be awake and alert to recognize him everywhere. May Christ be with us all on this journey that we might believe he is here.