

Come, Lord Jesus: wake us into life.

Every once in a while, clergy get a phone call in the middle of the night –
as do doctors, fire-fighters and others. it’s rarely good news.
It gets us out of a deep sleep, out of a dream and demands we swing into action.
We do when we need to – shake ourselves awake, get dressed,
put water on our faces and go out into the night, to the hospital,
the police station, wherever we’ve been summoned.
Advent is that wake-up call.
Our readings today remind us that we have been called to wake up,
while it is still night, still dark. Because nighttime is when we’re needed most.

Today’s readings talk about when the “Son of Man” is to return –
when Christ returns to ring down the curtain and roll up the sidewalks on
this earthly existence. Some Scripture suggests that will be a moment in time.
And maybe it will also be a steadily unfolding moment of which we are a part.
See, we don’t wake up from a dream so much as to a dream – God’s dream,
so beautifully painted in Isaiah’s prophecy, of a time beyond division,
beyond war, beyond violence, when *“they shall beat their swords into
plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up
sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more.”*

That is the mission of God –
to reclaim, restore, renew and reconcile all creation to wholeness in Christ.
And as God’s secret agents in that mission, God’s “sleeper cells,”
God wants His followers to be ready. United Way’s slogan is “Live United.”
Advent reminds us that our slogan as Christians is “Live Ready,” like people
who sign up with international courier services, who have to be ready at a
day’s notice to carry papers and messages to any place in the world.
They don’t know where or when they’re going, but are ready to go when called.
That’s how we’re called to live as Jesus people
carrying God’s contagious love into the world:
To be awake, alert, ready to bear Christ’s light into darkness wherever we find it.
to turn the light on injustice and wrongdoing,
to shine the light on hopelessness and despair,
to bring the healing light of Christ to those who suffer.

Last Sunday I had the honor of performing a wedding in a sick room, with a couple who'd planned a church wedding this fall, until cancer intervened. Declaring their love and commitment to each other in the face of death was a profound act of faith, shining a bright light in the gathering gloom.

Living ready means having our laundry done and our bags packed, listening for the alarm – and not hitting the snooze button. It means living our lives awake, not asleep, awake to the needs of the world around us, awake to the stirrings of God's spirit within us. Where do you sense God on the move? What is nudging you? Where is God calling us to join him in making people whole? Living ready means being conscious, not complacent.

The greatest enemy of faith is not doubt or disbelief, or even secularism. The greatest enemy of Christian faith is complacency, which is a real challenge to us some 2,020 years, give or take, since Christ's resurrection. We can be complacent about injustice, inequity, the environment – and so we consume more, to stuff down our feelings of helplessness. We can be complacent about the effects of stress, unhealthy food, lack of sleep on our bodies and minds, and so go deeper into denial. Addiction is a greater and greater problem in our culture – a sign of numbing rather than responding to challenges. Complacency doesn't come out of nowhere – it's a coping mechanism gone awry. It's a numbing unwillingness to look at reality. It's a choice to be unconscious.

By contrast, Jesus was always inviting his followers to be more conscious: to be aware of our gifts and sins, to be aware of the needs around us, to be aware of the Kingdom of God breaking in all around us; to be aware and alert and alive in our relationship with God the Father, to "live ready," because we know not the day nor the hour, to wake to God's beautiful dream where Love prevails.

Living ready isn't only about the end of the world – it's about how God's Kingdom is breaking in right here, right now. The membrane between this reality we live in, and God's in-breaking Life is very porous. Every time we act in faith, we poke a hole in it, so more God-Life can get in to this life. Jesus poked a big hole in it when he was born as an infant in Bethlehem; he blasted a hole in it when he died and rose again in Jerusalem.

And we keep making holes in it and letting more God-Life in every tie we speak hope into despair, and generosity into scarcity.
We can be light bearers wherever we encounter stressed and stressing people, especially at the mall, or in your office, on the roads or at your kitchen table. This Advent we will have lots of opportunities to be light bearers.
We can enter the most consumerist, materialistic season of our blessed year, and make it a time of spiritual deepening, training our muscles of readiness.
When I started working with a trainer at the gym, he made me use some muscles I never got around to before – never knew I had.
If we want to “live ready,” here’s a chance to work on some unfamiliar muscles. We already have the “giving” muscles pretty well developed –
We might want to do some flexing of the “receiving,” “reflecting” muscles.
When I was growing up, we always had an Advent wreath, and lit the candles, adding one each week, taking time to reflect and pray together.
Light them at night, one for each week of Advent, and pray for every stressed out person you’ve encountered that week, for the store clerks and frenzied parents.

We can flex our muscles of inviting – invite friends or neighbors with children who don’t attend to church to participate in our Gingerbread Extravaganza next Sunday, or our Family Service on Christmas Eve – they can be in the pageant. Invite someone to join you for our Baby Shower for Mary and Joseph during church on December 15, and bring a gift for homeless parents with infants. Invite people who despair about inequity in our culture to the Homeless Person’s Memorial Service here on December 19 – that service inspires hope.

We are called to bring the hope of Christ to all those who do not yet know him:
To proclaim His coming as an infant 2,000 years ago;
To proclaim His coming into our hearts and into our world through us now;
To proclaim His coming at the end of time to draw all things into His perfect love;
To proclaim God’s dream of a world beyond war, where everyone has enough,
of a humanity in harmony with itself and the creation,
a people who build up and to not tear down.

That’s what that alarm bell is waking us up for –
God’s dream of our glorious, eternal future of love, love and more love.
Wake up! *Amen.*

Matthew 24:37-44

Jesus said to the disciples, "But about that day and hour no one knows, neither the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. For as the days of Noah were, so will be the coming of the Son of Man. For as in those days before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day Noah entered the ark, and they knew nothing until the flood came and swept them all away, so too will be the coming of the Son of Man. Then two will be in the field; one will be taken and one will be left. Two women will be grinding meal together; one will be taken and one will be left.

Keep awake therefore, for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming.

But understand this: if the owner of the house had known in what part of the night the thief was coming, he would have stayed awake and would not have let his house be broken into. **Therefore you also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an unexpected hour.**

Isaiah 2:1-5

The word that Isaiah son of Amoz saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem. **In days to come the mountain of the Lord's house shall be established as the highest of the mountains, and shall be raised above the hills; all the nations shall stream to it.**

Many peoples shall come and say, "Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob; that he may teach us his ways and that we may walk in his paths." For out of Zion shall go forth instruction, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem.

He shall judge between the nations, and shall arbitrate for many peoples; they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more.

O house of Jacob, come, let us walk in the light of the LORD!

Romans 13:11-14

Besides this, **you know what time it is, how it is now the moment for you to wake from sleep.** For salvation is nearer to us now than when we became believers; the night is far gone, the day is near. **Let us then lay aside the works of darkness and put on the armor of light;** let us live honorably as in the day, not in reveling and drunkenness, not in debauchery and licentiousness, not in quarreling and jealousy.

Instead, **put on the Lord Jesus Christ**, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires.