

WAKEFULNESS
Randall Tremba
November 30, 2014
First Sunday of Advent
Shepherdstown Presbyterian Church

Mark 13:24-37

Jesus said: *When you hear of wars and rumors of wars, do not be alarmed; this must take place, this is not the end of things; the end is still to come. For nations will rise against nations, and kingdoms against kingdoms; there will be earthquakes and famines in various places. This is not the end; this is the beginning of birth.*

The sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, the stars will fall and the powers in the heavens will be shaken. Then you will see 'the Son of Man coming in clouds' [or 'child of humanity'] with great power and glory. Keep alert for you do not know when the time will come. Keep awake.

In other words, some times it feels like the end of the world or the end of your own small world; but it's not. Something new is aborning. Humanity may be on the rise among the nations or in your own heart. So, keep awake."

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Today is the First Sunday of Advent. Advent is not Christmas. It's not the birth; it's the expectation. It's not the arrival; it's the anticipation. Advent is labor; it's waiting and watching—waiting and watching with those who mourn the loss of home or what once made home so warm and happy.

I could name several in our parish who mourn, but I won't. You know them or know of them. You may be one yourself. Today many of us are in exile, refugees of one sort or another, longing to find home again, to find what has been lost and may never be found again. Many of us today are sorely bereft and bereaved.

In just a few minutes we will sing an ancient Advent hymn from the 12th century. We will sing it for, and with, those who mourn.

*O come, O come, Emmanuel,
And ransom captive Israel,
That mourns in lonely exile here
Until the Son of God appear.
Rejoice! Rejoice!
Emmanuel shall come to thee, O Israel.*

It says *Israel*, but it means more than Israel. You can be sure in 12th century Europe it didn't mean the nation of Israel. There was no such nation state at the time. There would be none until 1947. And you can be sure in 12th century Europe it didn't mean the Jewish people solely.

Israel stands for all people who struggle to make sense of a world full of injustice when everything in them believes that the Holy One, the Mystery of all life, namely God, is love. How can there be so much suffering when God is love and God is powerful?

Israel is an icon, a symbol. It means “one who struggles or grapples with El.” El is a Hebrew name for God, or the Holy One. And the name Emmanu-el means God, or the Holy One, *El is with us*. Nearby.

*Rejoice! Rejoice!
Emmanuel shall come to thee, O Israel*

To you who struggle to be restored, reborn, made whole.

Some times it feels like the end; but it's not. Keep watch. Take heart.

Today is the First Sunday of Advent. Advent is a season of waiting and watching—of waiting with those who long for wisdom, wisdom to know the way to live. Advent is time of waiting and longing with those who are fed up with the foolish ways of the world, fed up with foolishness of nations and peoples, of governments and corporations; fed up with the foolish ways of children, youth and adults bent on destruction of self and others.

Many of us are sorely disappointed and discouraged by the foolishness of certain people and certain nations, of certain policies and practices. When will we learn how to make peace instead of war, how to promote generosity instead of greed, how to promote freedom instead of addictions, how to preserve the planet instead of desecrating it?

Where is the wisdom lost in intelligence? So much intelligence; so little wisdom. It's enough to make you weep.

In just a few minutes we will sing an Advent hymn. We will sing it for and with those who long for the way of wisdom to prevail.

O come, Thou Wisdom from on high.

Today is the First Sunday of Advent. Advent is a season of waiting and watching—of waiting with those who long for peace in the midst of strife and discord.

And that brings us to Ferguson. Ferguson is on fire, or was and may be again. Ferguson is more than a place in Missouri. Ferguson has become an icon, a symbol for many people.

We all get that physical evidence and court rulings cannot be ignored so that one police officer becomes the scapegoat of 500 years of frustration with oppression and injustice. We get that.

But if we are awake, if our consciousness is heightened we also get that certain people in this nation have not enjoyed the privileges and equal protection that many of us have. It's not just black people. It's red, yellow, brown and even some white people.

Anger can be repressed for only so long before rage explodes. The Great Ancestors tell us so in a mythic folktale.

Cain killed his brother Abel because Cain was angry over his unjust treatment. It's a folktale but it reveals a propensity in all of us. Injustice, imagined or real,

provokes anger and unresolved anger can lead to rage, revenge, retaliation, murder and war.

Ferguson is burning with anger but so are parts of Syria, Iraq, Pakistan, Tibet, Burma, China and Ukraine.

In just a few minutes we will sing an Advent hymn. We will sing it for and with those who long for peace and justice.

*O come, Desire of nations
Bid envy, strife and discord cease.*

This is Advent. It's a time to wake up. It's a time to understand how hard and harsh the world can be. And therefore it is a time to be kind. After all, everyone you meet is carrying a heavy load. It's time to be kind today and even kinder tomorrow.

This is the season of Advent. What are you waiting for? In case you hadn't heard: we are the One we've been waiting for. The "child of humanity" is on the rise. All you need is love. And love is at hand. Emmanuel is here in our longing and in our wakefulness.

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HYMN

O Come, O Come, Emmanuel