

WAKE UP!!!

Isaiah 64:1-9; Mark 13:24-37

I remember as a small child a time when I just couldn't wait until Christmas. That countdown on the chocolate Advent calendar was so exciting, full of anticipation and longing. One year, I remember my twin sister Carol and me vowing to stay awake on Christmas Eve to catch Santa in the act. We were bound and determined to catch Santa, to get a glimpse of the jolly old elf in our very own 1970's style ranch home with a tiny, tiny chimney in it. It was justified childhood innocence.

That year, Carol and I made some very special spritz cookies, straight from the cookie press. We made it ourselves with Mom's help, of course, frosted each and every one with sprinkles and food colored reds and greens, and set it out right on the fireplace along with the tallest glass of whole milk you could find.

And, then we waited in our nightgowns, robes, and slippers. We promptly woke up in our beds the next morning unsure of how we got

there and that we couldn't stay awake. Running to the living room, however, we saw the plate, all but one cookie gone, that last cookie with one clear bite taken out of it; the milk half drunk – Santa must have been full.

Now, of course Santa has nothing to do with the Gospel reading for today, except that the original saint Nicholas AKA Santa Klaus, was a follower of Jesus Christ. But, I think we all can relate to that excitement, that looking forward to something and then falling asleep. Or, similarly, we run out of steam because it is so long in waiting that we just give up our excitement.

First glimpse into the Gospel reading this Sunday in Advent, we may be tempted to think Jesus is telling us the future. And, indeed, it seems like that at first glance. It does seem like a description of an apocalypse:

“But in those days, after that suffering, the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light... Then he will send out the angels, and

gather his elect from the four winds, from the ends of the earth to the ends of heaven.”

Yes, indeed, it sounds like the future. And, it sounds like a future where we had better stay awake for it, too. Be aware. Be alert, Jesus says, for you will not know the day or hour. This does not sound like something to leave cookies and milk for.

But, even as many people would read this passage in Mark’s gospel as a prediction of the end of the world, there really isn’t anything in this chapter that suggests it is the end of the world. And, in fact, there isn’t even an indication here that Jesus comes to judge the world and those living in it. It simply says that when these things take place, the Son of Man, Jesus Christ, will be *near* and the generation in which this Gospel was written will not pass before these events happen.

So, is this word Jesus is telling his disciples in this particular part of scripture actually about his second coming? Is it about the end of the world all or even a future

that is way in the distant that we ought to stay awake for? We trust in the coming of Christ in the end of time, but is that really what is being said here?

Consider this. Indeed, Jesus is speaking of him coming in glory, but not necessarily the time when he comes to judge the earth at the end of time. In today’s scripture from Mark’s Gospel, it is more likely that Jesus is speaking of the most important event in all of history that is about to happen in his life: he is speaking to his disciples about his death and resurrection, how it will come to be. And, furthermore, based upon how Mark catalogs the words of Jesus here in his Gospel, we can tell this is so.

If you were to compare this scripture with the passion narrative in its entirety, from when the disciples fall asleep in the garden to the Son of Man coming again in glory at instead what is the Resurrection of Jesus, the same temporal language is used in both places, here in chapter 13

and then again in chapter 16 at the time of the crucifixion.

When Jesus speaks of the disciple's need to be watchful, he's giving them a heads up on the things that will happen on the night on his betrayal in the garden and again at his crucifixion: some of the words used are evening, midnight, cockcrow, dawn - the inability to stay awake- the moon darkened and the sun not giving light, the power of the heavens shaken - the entire passion narrative is right there in this short passage of Mark's Gospel.

Could it be that the Gospel writer Mark wants us to know that Jesus is speaking to his disciples about the coming of the Son of Man alright, but not in some far off future. The glory of Christ's coming is that moment at the cross and the open grave, where Jesus Christ is truly and finally revealed as the Son of God. Perhaps he is speaking about the crucifixion and resurrection that is just about to happen and before that very generation even is over as he says- Wake up! Stay

awake for it. For it is coming and you aren't ready!

So, if this is the case, that this isn't about our being better prepared for Jesus when he comes again to judge the earth, and if it isn't only about whether we have some promise in the distant future when Christ comes, what if instead of only preparing for the second coming of Christ, this Christmas, we simply take some time to see where he is now. After all, in all human frailty and brokenness, Christ entered into the world as we are - human. He is always first present in that way for our sake. That is part of the beauty and the vulnerability of the Incarnation - God with us.

Christ comes to us as the crucified and Risen Lord as we are now today, not as we could be or should be, not even as we will be. And, when we don't stay awake; that is in our discipleship or attentiveness to God's daily desires for us, the promised presence of the crucified and risen Lord still remains that he will be "near" to us even though we might not

always be the best at being awake for it.

Of course, there always is room for improvement. Christ does tell us to be prepared, to attend to the signs around us. We do often fall asleep when we should be attuned to the needs of the world and to our own brokenness. Of course, the world needs our willing hands, our hearts for the neighbor. Christ does need vigilance during this pandemic. It can be so easy to stop being attentive given how fatiguing and overwhelming the world is.

And, indeed while massive hurricanes and destructive fires rage, racial injustice continues and refugees all over the world flee from war, Christ does ask us to continue in the world with wakefulness for the sake of the neighbor. And, in his coming, whether that be his coming in the future, in the manger, upon the cross, at the tomb, or in the now, right here.

But, today, even as we keep awake, we are also reminded that it is not all up to us, as the prophet Isaiah says in

today's first reading, "Yet, O Lord, you are our Father; we are the clay, and you are our potter; we are all the work of your hand." Perhaps in our attempts to stay awake for the coming of Christ in our daily doings, we remember that God does the molding and the tending.

So, this Advent, this year especially, rather than focusing on preparing for something in the distance, and instead of always looking ahead to a future we hope will be different, maybe today as we anticipate the coming of Christ, we ask God to help us with today, to help us to wake up right now and see his presence among us, with us, here and just as we are. For Christ has promised to come. Let us rejoice as children excited for Christmas morning. Amen.