

Keep awake! Can you see our Savior coming?
Matthew 24: 36 – 44

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It was always around this time of the year that the warnings began – the warnings from my mother that is. She warned us that if we didn't behave, Santa would not come and we wouldn't get any Christmas presents. If we didn't clean the living room properly or were slow to hang out the washing because we were watching cartoons, she said it again. You keep this up and no Christmas presents this year. It never actually happened although it seemed as if we came close sometimes. And while this struck fear and good behavior into me at the age of 9 or 10, by the time I reached 14, I was pretty sure that the presents would still come although I did not push my luck.

In our gospel this morning, there are lots of warnings. It is one part of a series of warnings in Jesus' response to the disciples when after hearing him talk about the destruction of the temple, they ask him privately, "When will this happen, and what will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?"

Jesus says, there is a day and hour that no one knows that is coming. Just as in the days of Noah, people were going about their daily business, eating and drinking, getting married, and then the flood came and swept them all away. This is how the coming of the Son of Man will be. Two women will be grinding meal and one gets taken away. Two men are working in the field. One gets taken and the other is left. Keep awake for you do not know when your Lord is coming." We are then given the example of the owner of the house not having his house being broken into if he had been awake. Not really an attractive reading is it? Who wants to anticipate the coming of Christ knowing that some will be taken and some will be left? Or knowing that some will be swept away and others will be saved? Who wants to think about Jesus' coming like a thief breaking into your house? It is a scary way to anticipate the coming of Christ. Jesus must really be trying to get our attention. And yet I find even with the intensity of Jesus' words, it is easy for us to ignore them. Most of us have heard them before and they become like the warnings from my mother over the years that I stopped paying attention to. Even if these words from Jesus are new to us, the activities in our lives can easily drown them out. After all, there are only 24 shopping days until Christmas! How much has to be done before then?

Why is it so important that we hear Jesus' words to keep awake? Maybe it is because we are asleep, lulled into complacency that nothing new is really happening or can happen. Our pace of life is fast and preparing for Christmas just adds to it. We follow the status quo for the Christmas grind – we buy the presents, send out Christmas cards, cook the holiday meals and attend the parties. Even if the Savior were to show up would we notice? Are we letting the pace of life block us from what Christ is doing in this world?

This is why I am inviting you today to pause – pause to see how Christ is working all around you. About a month ago, our Confirmation class spent two days together. One of our activities was a prayer walk. We walked through the city of Perth Amboy. The

instructions were notice who and what we encountered and pray for what we saw AND we did it in silence. About $\frac{3}{4}$ way through the prayer walk, I broke down and let them talk.

After we got back, we reflected on what we had seen and who we had prayed for. There were some pretty wonderful reflections – seeing the person taking their laundry to the laundromat and the person who seemed a little lost and out of place. Prayers were even said for a cat. When I asked them, which part they were most attentive in, they acknowledged that it is was in the silence. Once we started talking, we saw so much less.

Silence is not the only way to be attentive to Christ but is a great place to start. Just yesterday, as I drove to the gym, I turned off the radio so I could better hear what God wanted me to preach about today. This Advent, could you take 5 min of silence to listen to God – in the car or before you go into work? Could you do a prayer walk even for just one block? Could you take one of Advent devotionals and spend some time pondering the questions offered? Perhaps take some time just to hold that newborn child, cousin or grandchild and look at the wonder of what God has created. Maybe get out a coloring book or your knitting and turn off the TV and see what comes to you.

Keep awake. Find a way to keep awake. Do not miss the urgency in Jesus' words. Find a way to turn your time and attention to how Christ is working in this world. Christ is transforming this world and if we aren't careful, we might miss it. And how much more amazing might this Christmas be, if we have been watching out for the Savior of the world?