

Advent 1: Year A

December 1, 2019

Rev. Ken Wratten at St. Luke's

Isaiah 2:1-5 The future will bring an end to war. Walk in the light of the Lord.

Romans 13:11-14 Wake from sleep; put on the armor of light; put on Christ

Matthew 24:36-44 Keep awake; be ready; Jesus will return at an unexpected time

Today we begin the holy season of Advent. And in this season of lengthening nights; of cold, wet weather; the change from fall colors in the trees to a grayish cast to everything; all of this darkness starts being overtaken with colored light bulbs, strings of sparkly garland, joyful music, warm memories of our time as children at this time of year, and by the glow of candlelight – all of these images of 'light' are represented by the first candle of Advent that we lit this morning.

The prophet Isaiah wrote that 'in the days to come' God will bring a lasting peace. Paul wrote to the Romans that 'salvation is nearer to us now than when we became believers.' And in Matthew's Gospel, Jesus said, 'Be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an unexpected hour.'

This is a time of waiting; expectancy; hope; and even urgency for the fulfillment of hopes and divine promises. Far more lasting than the gadgets advertised in Black Friday sales, this is a time of year filled with the power of possibilities. I feel it every year as Advent begins, regardless of whether the year winding down has been particularly good or bad. This is a special time; a holy time. I LOVE being in a liturgical church. A few years ago in San Jose, Ruth went to 3 stores looking for an Advent calendar with chocolate behind each door (for me??). One store had no idea what an Advent calendar was, much less whether they had any. I cannot imagine missing out on Advent.

Advent season celebrates that Jesus has come into the world, and his arrival changed everything. And Advent celebrates that he has promised to come back. And when he returns, God has promised a spectacular eternity for those who believe in and follow his Son.

Jesus is the source of a new light in the world. John's prologue describes Jesus in this way; *'In him was life, and that life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, but the darkness has not understood it.'*

Jesus brought us a first hand report on the true character of God; a god of love, hope, purpose, and caring. As you see the lights decorating our streets and lawns and windows and trees this Advent season, even the lights that aren't on manger scenes, or crosses; I encourage you to let all of the lights remind you of the light of Jesus that is in the world.

In our Gospel lesson today, Jesus was delivering his third long private teaching to his disciples, on the Mount of Olives. He was explaining that he would come back some day, suddenly and unexpectedly. He said that they/we should ‘keep awake’, and ‘be ready’ for his coming. A logical question might be, how could anybody ever be ready for the end of time as we know it? How can we make ourselves ready for an event like that?

In Romans 13 Paul tells us how to be ready. He said to ‘put on the armor of light... put on the Lord Jesus Christ’. (#1) In the same way that Jesus is light to the world, you and I are expected to carry that light into the world. Whatever it is that Jesus is asking each of us to do with our life, we need to make sure we are busy doing it.

Jesus said in Matthew 5:14, ‘You are the light of the world... Let your light shine.’ We keep ready for Jesus’ return by making sure people can see the light that lives inside us. When you see busy cashiers in stores this season, or when you see your mail carrier who is working a 14 hour day now, or you see your child’s or grandchild’s teacher at school trying to handle 45 kids who are all filled with the holiday wiggles, be a light in their day. Say, “Thank you for all you do, and Merry Christmas.”

#2: To be that light of the world, we need to keep connected to the power source. If you unplug a light from the wall outlet, it goes out. We need to keep connected to Jesus, in order to be his light in the world. That connection happens in our personal spiritual time (make some of you don’t have any now). And that connection happens when we join our faith community in worship (every Sunday of Advent), or to do ministry (next Saturday at the Food Bank), or share in Christian fellowship (Coffee Hour / or the Parish Thanksgiving Dinner / or the 12/15 Christmas Concert).

#3: Finally, to be that light in the world, we need to be ready; we need to live every second as though this is the day Jesus is coming back. Have you seen the bumper sticker that says, ‘Caution: In case of the apocalypse, this car will have no driver’. Or another bumper sticker Bishop Mary told us about in an address at Convention a few years ago; ‘Jesus is coming back: Look busy!’

Let people see the light of Christ in you; keep connected to the power source; and live every day being ready.

I have a little reminder for each of us to keep with us during this season. [Hand out ‘God Bless Us, Every one!’ magnets. Tiny Tim in ‘The Christmas Carol.’]

May you be blessed this holy season; and may you be a blessing this holy season.
Amen