

### On our watch

A sermon by the Reverend Robert Bruce Edson in Emmanuel Episcopal Church, West Roxbury, Massachusetts, on Advent Sunday, December 3, 2017

And what I say to you I say to all: Keep awake. Mark 13:37

When taking our responsibilities seriously Jesus urges us to be awake and aware on our watch. The prophets of long ago anticipated the birth of a savior who would restore their nation to their former greatness. In our own time, there is a keen sense of watchfulness concerning the quality and values of twenty-first American life. For Christians, we need to be ready to come to terms with what Christ expects at all times and in all situations with a watchful eye on maintaining good standards of behavior.

Jesus uses the analogy of going on a journey and leaving the care of the home with someone to keep watch over it. The doorkeeper is warned that the return of the master of the household will come at a time when least expected. We, doorkeepers of our soul, have to be on alert to give an account of our selves. We need to remain awake and aware to receive Christ into the innermost parts of our lives and be prepared to meet him in both friend and stranger.

This Advent season is a time of anticipation and expectation, a time to get our lives in order for Jesus to be at the center of who we are and what we do. With Christ at the center, we have a source with which to maintain a manner of life that is ready and prepared to give and accounting of ourselves. It means nurturing all our relationships both with both friend and stranger who come in and out of our daily lives. It involves repairing broken relationships with those with whom we have serious disagreements. We face judgment every day and cannot hide even the most innermost part of our lives from God to whom "all hearts are open, all desires known and from whom no secrets are hid." (Book of Common Prayer, p. 355.)

The world has never been the same since God intervened in human history in the birth of the Christ. God intervenes in our own time to call us to repentance. If you are embarrassed at how little you know of the Bible and the Christian faith, avail yourself of the opportunities to learn more. Reluctance and self-consciousness should not be a barrier to learning. Confronting our own frailties makes us uncomfortable, but when we apply the scriptures in the context of our lives, we need to know how and why it is important that we maintain the highest standards of behavior at home, in school, at work and in the marketplace.

In this season of Advent, we anticipate the celebration of God entering human history in the birth of Christ. He comes to us again and again in this great sacrament of the Eucharist. We anticipate his coming again in whatever way God chooses to bring us to repentance. To know Christ intimately is to know his sovereignty over all temporal authority, all principalities and powers of every kind.

So much of life is waiting in anticipation. We wait for a college acceptance, a job opportunity, a child to be born, the arrival of a long awaited visitor, a reuniting of those who have been estranged, or a healing after a sickness or a loss.

You may wonder how we can have a sense of hope in the midst of daily news reports of the awful violence committed on the streets, in schools and even churches. We are seeing the revelation of prominent people being called to account for their misconduct with their misuse their power and position to intimidate and coerce. If there is any good that comes out of this it is that victims of abuse are being empowered to come forward to testify.

It is essential that the places where we live and work are safe and secure. Be awake and aware. Strive for a true sense of honesty, integrity, wholeness and transparency in all your relationships. We must always be aware of and sensitive to the feelings and needs of others as we are of our own. Political correctness may be easily dismissed, but it is simply treating others with the respect we want for ourselves.

Eschatology is a theological term that you may never have heard. Preachers should not assume that everyone knows what it is. Eschatology refers to the end times when this age will be brought to completion. It is the point in human history when we all will give an accounting of ourselves before God in complete openness and honesty. By so doing, we hold to the hope and expectation of being redeemed.

Let this Advent be a time to reflect on where we are now and where we are headed. As we complete our efforts at long term strategic planning for our parish today, we are charting our course for our future. I commend those of you who have been part of investing in the future of our parish. One of our strengths is welcoming visitors and newcomers. This is an essential part of our life together because it doesn't take much for a bad impression to keep visitors from ever coming back. Courtesy and thoughtfulness are essential qualities in building up the body of Christ in the household of God

We awaken to the meaning of this Advent season by drawing on the lessons of the past as we face the future with confidence. Now is the only time we can do anything about what matters. Now is the only opportunity we have to influence the future.

I would encourage you to avoid a fatalist attitude. It is said that fate has a hopeless end while faith has endless hope. Faith is having confidence and assurance in what we neither see nor understand. It is expecting that what is thought to be impossible can be possible. It is the belief and assurance that God's promises will be filled in God's time. It is being part of making the way for Christ to come into our lives to bring order out of chaos, good out of evil, and love out of hate. Christ comes to us not in weakness, but in power; not in darkness, but in light; not to destroy, but to fulfill God's purposes in us.