

## Daily Devotional Guide

*The devotional guide for this week was written by Rev. Sidney Tompkins. Pastor Sidney helps us reflect more on what it means to be ready when Jesus shows up in our lives. Remember, Advent is about “waiting” for Christ.*

**Monday:** God comes to us often when we least expect the visit, and gives us news that we may hardly be prepared to grasp. Imagine how Abraham and Sarah felt as Abraham was told that his 90-year-old wife would bear a son (Genesis 17.15-17). Or how Mary, engaged to Joseph, felt as Gabriel announced to her that she would give birth to Jesus (Luke 1.26-30)? How prepared do you think each was to take on the new life that God called them to? How might you have responded?

**Tuesday:** What about Peter, Andrew, James and John as they went about their business of commercial fishing (Matthew 4.18-22)? How does their ready response to Jesus’ invitation to quit and follow him indicate their level of preparedness? What does that tell you about these men? If Jesus came to you at work and invited you to do likewise, how would you respond?

**Wednesday:** Jesus’ parable in Matthew 25.1-13 about the ten bridesmaids and their readiness to meet the bridegroom presented a challenge that five met easily. Their oil lamps were full and burning; the others had to go shopping. In the midst of hurricane season, we might easily relate to the need to have supplies on hand to avoid the last minute rush in the face of an approaching storm. But God is ever-present and will drop in on us without advanced notice! How full is the lamp of your spirit with God oil?

**Thursday:** In Matthew 26.36-41 we read that even Peter, James and John had difficulty staying alert for Jesus in his time of great need—and they were his closest disciples! How willing is your spirit and how weak is your flesh to be faithful?

**Friday:** As you read Matthew 5.23-24, notice that Jesus is teaching that even if you are at the altar of God when you remember that you have an issue with someone else, you clearly aren’t ready to be there until you resolve your issue with that person. Examine your relationships with others. What issues might you have that you need to resolve before they get in the way of your relationship with Jesus?



### PASADENA COMMUNITY CHURCH

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## Pasadena Community Church

### Songs of Christmas (part 2) “Oh, You’d Better Watch Out!”

Sunday, November 27, 2011

Sermon by: Dr. Charley Reeb, Senior Pastor

Scripture Lesson: Mark 13: 33-47

I must admit that when I began thinking about this series there were some Christmas songs that I was quick to eliminate. For example, “Grandma Got Run Over by a Reindeer” did not make the list. According to one survey, “Grandma Got Run Over by a Reindeer” is now the most requested Christmas song ever and has sold more than 10 million copies. I will add, however, that some polls rate it the most disliked Christmas song of all time. I guess there is no accounting for taste.

You will also be glad to know that I decided not to use “The 12 Days of Christmas” either! Can you imagine how long that sermon would be?

For the first Sunday of Advent I decided to use to first line to the popular Christmas song, “Santa Claus Is Coming to Town.” It fits our text and theme for today. I agree with King Duncan who said that this Christmas song sounds very much like an effort by parents to get children to behave themselves during the month of December: “Oh, you better watch out, you better not cry, you better not pout, I’m telling you why: Santa Claus is coming to town.” What about these lines: “He’s making his list, checking it twice, gonna find out who’s naughty or nice.” In other words, “Kids, behave, or Santa will pass you by!”

The truth is many people think of God this way. Many see God as this man in heaven with a big white beard who has a list on everyone. They assume God is checking these lists every day, making sure we are behaving ourselves. Therefore, it is no surprise that many folks read the same kind of warning into our lesson for today from the gospel of Mark.

The text seems to be clear. Be ready. Jesus

could come at any moment. Be watching and waiting. Stay alert. Look busy! He is going to come when you least expect him. So don’t goof off. And don’t even think about catching a quick nap. You just don’t know when he will show up.

This warning in Mark about Jesus showing up is a bit off putting. I can see where it would make some folks feel a little uneasy. Well, if you are where you are supposed to be, doing what you are supposed to be doing, if you are alert, you will be ready. And, if you are not ready, well, you won’t know what hit you. You will be unprepared. It will come out of nowhere. Make sure you are alert. Stay awake!

I had a friend in college who was as pure as the driven snow. He never did anything wrong. He just went to class then went back to his room. He read his Bible twice a day. He never went out to movies or to parties. He was convinced that Jesus was coming back any moment. When asked why he didn’t go out, he would say, “When he comes back I want to be ready and alert. My worst fear is that when Jesus comes back I will be doing something I shouldn’t be doing. You know, he said he is coming when you least expect him.”

He was right. Jesus said it in our text. It couldn’t be any clearer. “Be ready. I’m coming when you least expect me.” But when Jesus said this he didn’t intend for his followers to be joyless until he returned. But some people can’t help but be anxious about it.

In one of Peter DeVries’ novels there is a character named Stan Waltz. He is married to a woman who belongs to a fundamentalist church. One night they were awakened by a deafening explosion of a fireworks factory in the town.

Waltz's wife convinces him that it is the second coming of Christ. So he hastily baptizes himself under the cold water faucet in the kitchen, just in case!

I guess the anxiety of Jesus coming unexpectedly is what drives some people to treat it like a solvable math equation. They have to know. They see the Bible as having a secret code to decipher. And they misuse the Bible and put this passage and that passage together. They create time lines and dates. They sell books with dramatic titles and make movies about the end of the world. Many over the years have claimed they know. They set the date. The date comes and goes and many are left with lighter wallets and purses because they bought into the hype.

The hype continues even though Jesus said it would be unexpected. The hype continues even though Jesus said, "No person knows the hour." But the hype and the desire to know will always be with us until Jesus returns because it will always be hard for some to accept the surprise of all of it – the unexpected nature of all of it.

If we are honest, we feel that the passage today does beg the question: Why does it have to be such a surprise? Why does it have to be so unexpected? Why can't we be given fair warning? It seems like the merciful thing to do. Is God playing some kind of trick? Is God trying to trap us? That does not seem very loving. That does not seem very gracious. That does not seem like the God I know. Isn't it texts like these that scare people away from the faith?

Well, the popular preacher response is, "Well, if you knew when, you would live how you wanted to live and do whatever you wanted to do and then slide in at the last minute. If I told you Christ was coming back at noon tomorrow, you would live it up, party all night, engage in all kind of sin and debauchery, get it out of your system and then show up 5 minutes before noon, slide right into your seat and say, 'Okay, ready to go. I didn't miss anything, did I?'" Well, maybe you would do that, but maybe not.

I tend to think of it in another way. The coming of Christ is unexpected because we have never been very good at predicting or anticipating how God operates. Heck, most people didn't recognize Jesus the first time he came. What makes us think we will anticipate his return?

What do you think would have happened if God had gathered all the best advertisers, PR gurus and campaign managers and said, "Okay, I am planning my entrance into the world. I am planning to show the world who I am. What do you think of this? I begin as a baby born from the womb of a teenaged peasant girl. I spend my first days in a feeding trough. I grow up poor. When I grow up my first sermon is so offensive that I almost get thrown off a cliff by my hometown. Then I gather the worst group of rag tag disciples. I hang out with outcasts, drunks and prostitutes. I challenge the status quo, get arrested, get tortured and killed. What do you think?"

Let's face it. Most of us would not have recognized God in Jesus if we would have lived when he walked the earth. Don't feel bad. Most people didn't recognize him as God either. The religious leaders who were looking and praying for the Messiah yelled, "Crucify him!" The political authorities saw him as a nuisance and washed their hands of him. The masses saw him as a great orator who performed a few magic tricks but tired of him when he kept speaking the truth. Heck, even the disciples fell asleep when he was about to be betrayed and later his followers turned their back on him. Ironically, in Mark it was a Roman Centurion, who played a part in Jesus' execution, who looked up at Jesus as he was dying and said, "Truly this was the Son of God." How come no one else noticed?

It didn't get much better when Jesus was resurrected and his Spirit came upon the church at Pentecost. A little over hundred gathered. The wind blew and they all began to speak in foreign languages. But nobody else noticed it was God, at least not until Peter explained what was going on. In fact, when the religious authorities heard all the commotion, they thought it was a frat party and made fun of them. "They have had too much Budweiser!" Peter said, "No, it is only nine in the morning!" And then he began to preach. And some believed. But, you know, there were others who didn't.

We are not very good at anticipating how God is going to show up. We are not very good at expecting God. I believe this is why this text from Mark is so appropriate for us today as we begin the season of Advent. Advent means "to come" or "arrival." Advent is about preparing ourselves for God to show up – not just in the second coming but

also in our everyday lives!

We need this text today as we prepare ourselves for God to show up because what the text is basically saying to us is "Stay awake! Stay alert. Because when God shows up chances are it will not be in a way that you might expect. It will not be in a way that you anticipate! Don't be lulled to sleep by the numbing promises of culture. Don't be lulled to sleep by the cynicism of the world. Don't be lulled to sleep by the consumerism of the season, lest you miss God in your life!"

It makes sense that Jesus chose the phrase "Keep awake!" Have you ever been awakened from a deep sleep in the middle of the night? Have you ever been awakened from a cozy nap on the couch in front of the TV? Annoying, isn't it? Disruptive, isn't it? Well, for those who are spiritually asleep, it can be downright disruptive when God shows up. That twinge of conscience when it is inconvenient. That frustration when the church is asking for money again. The need to forgive when all you want to do is get even. The call to do something, to serve that keeps nagging at you and won't leave you alone. Somebody needs help. "Stop bothering me. Let me sleep. Let me live my life!"

It is a sad thing to think about someone being asleep when God shows up in life. It is a sad thing to think about someone missing an opportunity from God. It is a sad thing to think about people's eyes being so glazed over that they never notice their virtues being whittled away. It is a sad thing to think about someone living their whole life and at the very end asking, "What was the point?"

You see, so many of us want to experience God and follow God but so many feel disrupted when God shows up. We want God, but are we prepared for God? The truth that often hurts is that so often we want God on our own terms. So when God comes in a way that does not fit our preconceived ideas, schedules, or our timelines and agendas, we miss it. We are asleep!

One of the things I have learned in my own walk with God is "Expect the unexpected." God's ways are so different from the ways of the world. The world says, "I want power!" Jesus says, "I'll take humility." The world says, "I want to win!" Jesus says, "I just want to love." The world says, "I want control."

Jesus says, "I just want to be open, willing and available."

I believe that when Jesus said "Stay awake! Be alert!" he was telling us to expect the unexpected from God. When we learn to expect the unexpected from God and God does show up, it does not feel like a disruption or an inconvenience, or a coincidence; it feels like a pleasant surprise. It feels like running into an old friend and picking up right where you left off. It feels like enjoying something you thought would make you miserable. It feels like finding out that what makes you happy is not what you thought would make you happy.

Once upon a time there was a church – a very successful church, an affluent church. They had all the bells and whistles. They seemed to be doing everything right. Sunday morning came. They gathered in the sanctuary. A visitor showed up. It looked like he had slept on the street. His hair was matted down. He didn't smell very good. His clothes were old and torn. He looked out of place. He made his way down the aisle and sat in a pew. Some in the pew moved away from him and others got up and found a seat somewhere else.

But there was one lady who stayed. In fact, she got up and sat right next to him. He turned and looked at her and she looked at him. He said, "I recognize you, you know." She said, "You do?" He replied, "Yes, don't you recognize me? The lady looked puzzled. He said, "Remember that time I was a stranger, and you welcomed me? You remember that time I was hungry and you gave me something to eat. Remember that time I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink. Remember that time when I was naked and you clothed me. Remember that time I was in prison and you visited me. Remember that time I was sick and you took care of me?" She replied, "Yes! I do remember! I've been expecting you, Lord."

"Therefore, keep awake - for you do not know when the master of the house will come, in the evening, or at midnight, or at cockcrow, or at dawn, or else he may find you asleep when he comes suddenly. And what I say to you I say to all – Keep awake!" Amen.

This Advent, you'd better watch out! Stay awake! Expect the unexpected from God. Amen.