

Dreams and Disruptions

A Sermon for Pilgrim Congregational Church, UCC, Lexington

Rev. Reebee Girash

November 29, 2020 (The First Sunday of Advent)

Text: Mark 13:24-37

24 'But in those days, after that suffering,

the sun will be darkened,

and the moon will not give its light,

²⁵ and the stars will be falling from heaven,

and the powers in the heavens will be shaken.

²⁶Then they will see "the Son of Man coming in clouds" with great power and glory.

²⁷Then 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.

28 'From the fig tree learn its lesson: as soon as its branch becomes tender and puts forth its leaves, you know that summer is near. ²⁹So also, when you see these things taking place, you know that he is near, at the very gates. ³⁰Truly I tell you, this generation will not pass away until all these things have taken place. ³¹Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.

32 'But about that day or hour no one knows, neither the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. ³³Beware, keep alert; for you do not know when the time will come.

³⁴It is like a man going on a journey, when he leaves home and puts his slaves in charge, each with his work, and commands the doorkeeper to be on the watch.

³⁵Therefore, 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, ³⁶or else he may find you asleep when he comes suddenly. ³⁷And what I say to you I say to all: Keep awake.'

Prayer

Sermon

On Monday, after the long rainstorm, I walked to the post office. The trees were still splashing and drizzling down, so my ball cap was pulled low, and there was something very interesting on my phone, I'm certain it was fascinating. I walked up the wooded path I know well enough to travel with eyes closed and paid no attention to the world around me.

And suddenly there was something moving very close to my head,
Something flying,
Swooping in a wide arc
From behind me on the path,
To the tree branch just in front of me.

(screen share images)



A cooper's hawk.
Just above me.

It stayed long enough
To say something

That sounded like,

Beware, keep alert; for you do not know when the time will come.

In another Advent text from Isaiah, the prophet cries out for God to come near:
“O that you would tear open the heavens and come down!” (Isaiah 64:1)

There are moments when we call out to God,
Tear open the heavens and come down!

Come down and rescue us.

Come down and fix this.

How is it possible that we are still waiting?

And there are times when we are stuck, distracted, or weary...

Not paying attention, in other words,
Not keeping awake. No alertness in us.

This morning’s Gospel reading might meet us in either state of being.

Because this text, on the first Sunday of Advent, is a disruption.
It is a shock,
Not necessarily a terror,
But a unveiling of what is broken,
And perhaps
a hopeful revealing of what might yet come to be.

We call this portion of Mark the Little Apocalypse,
Which sounds destructive and terrible,
But an apocalypse the way Mark and Daniel and John knew it, is an unveiling - a
revealing - a reorientation.

Mark’s community lived in the time between,
After Jesus’s death,
In the midst of the destruction of the temple and ongoing conflict with Roman occupiers.
Mark’s community faced disruption and disorientation.

“24 ‘But in those days, after that suffering,

the sun will be darkened,

and the moon will not give its light,

²⁵ and the stars will be falling from heaven,

and the powers in the heavens will be shaken.

²⁶Then they will see “the Son of Man coming in clouds” with great power and glory.

²⁷Then 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.”

We are living in the in-between time,

The turn of the season,

With case counts rising,

Grief destroying,

A revealing of the brokenness of health care and education,

Structural racism being laid bare,

Political division stunning us,

Poverty and food insecurity on the rise.

This is either a time of great unraveling and destruction,

Or a time of great revelation and disruption.

What will happen next?

What is being revealed?

Keep awake!

Imagine what is next! Dream it into being!

Hannah Garrity says, “We are poised on a threshold. The dreams that we dream now will build the new world....Dream, then build.”

The first Gospel texts of Advent every year are stunning disturbances that come to us almost dreamlike,

Commanding us to stay awake,

To ready ourselves,

Asking us to imagine change, to imagine new life,

To envision a holy disruption of the norm.

We need that holy disruption, that surreal and new dream, that hopeful command, more than ever.

Mark's listeners expected Jesus' imminent return - and let's be honest, we don't. But Mark's invitation is to us, as well. As Fred Craddock put it, "To watch is not to scan the heavens...comb through obscure texts" [to figure out which day Jesus is coming back]. "Such uninvolved waiting for the Messiah is not hope; it's postponement and evasion. To keep awake is to be faithful in our work, as if we are already in the presence of the one for whose coming our hearts are eager."¹

Mark dreams: "Then they will see "the Son of Man coming in clouds" with great power and glory. ²⁷Then he will send out the angels,"

Who are the angels?

One Pilgrim has taught me the term earth-angels and I wonder if perhaps, when we are awake watching; when we are able to dream with hope and live in a way "in which all circumstances manifest God," if there is some way for us to become the ones he sends into the world.

And so we come to Advent, in 2020, the toughest year our world has known in a while. And the text says, keep awake. Don't fall asleep on oppression for in keeping awake to it, we can dream a world beyond it; don't become inured to tragedy, but dream hope into being.

Here is the good news of this season,
This specific, 2020 Advent:

In a year like this, it is good news that "such shadows are precisely the place where Jesus comes, and where the church is called to go."²

The good news right now

Is that communities supporting the most vulnerable brings hope to those in need;

A scientific mobilization toward a vaccine gives the world hope for health;

The greatest voter turnout since 1908 gives hope that democracy can survive even 2020;

Frontline workers recognized as essential gives hope for a more equitable society;

¹ Preaching Through the Christian Year, B.

² Matthew Myer Boulton and Liz Myer Boulton, Salt Project, <https://www.saltproject.org/progressive-christian-blog/2017/11/27/keep-awake-lectionary-commentary-advent-week-one>

New attention to racial justice gives hope for a just world.

There is hope in this world, emerging around us.

And you know, Jesus is already here...and

Once more, Jesus is coming,

God-with-us,

Emmanuel,

Jesus is coming once more into the world that needs love, needs hope, needs new life.

Jesus is coming,

To deliver and restore, to heal and to bless,

To walk next to us

And show us the way.

He is already here.

Keep awake

Dreaming hope into being,

and you just might catch a glimpse.

Let me close with the words of Langston Hughes.

Hold fast to dreams

For if dreams die

Life is a broken-winged bird

That cannot fly.³

Amen.

Leora Tubbs Tisdale says it more pointedly: "Life is short. Live in a way that makes a difference."⁴

³ Hughes, Langston. "Dreams." The Collected Works of Langston Hughes. Copyright © 2002 by Langston Hughes. <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/150995/dreams-5d767850da976>

⁴ Preaching God's Transformative Justice, Year B.