

December 1, 2019

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Reading: Matthew 24:36-44

The Message: Jesus is Coming! **Look Busy!**

Jesus addresses people's concerns about the end ... from the Mount of Olives where he is about to begin his own arrest, trial, and crucifixion. Like us, they wanted to know when, who, and what they had to do to be saved.

Why these scary words about the end times -- the second coming -- at the beginning of Advent?

- dismissed as something we don't really need to believe
- used by others to comment on the state of the world now

But the message of Christ's return is not meant to frighten us. It's about promise. When he comes he "will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other" (24:31).

What is it to be prepared? There is no clue as to what we should be doing apart from being alert. But we do know Jesus may come again at any time:

Noah - may be an extraordinary time
fields or mill -- could be a normal every day time
nocturnal burglar -- be watchful -- put your spiritual motion detector lights up

Keep awake, be ready -- can sometimes turn into:

Jesus is coming! Get Busy!

When I was working at St. Christopher's Hospice as a student, I didn't know much about the medical system, so it wasn't until later that I realized just how unique the world's first hospice was. All of the staff were trained to listen to patients. To stay alert to their spiritual and emotional needs, in addition to their physical needs.

This wasn't easy for some nurses, especially new ones. Whenever our senior tutor or matron or doctor appeared on the unit, some would leap to their feet and scurry around looking busy. Gently, constantly, they would be reminded that sitting by a bedside, holding a hand, rubbing a back, just waiting, these were the most important parts of their jobs.

Often we think that it is up to us to do something to be ready for God -- Jesus is coming -- Look busy! Like a class left by a teacher with a task, we will leap into high gear when we think the teacher is about to come into the room.

But I don't think that's it at all. Be alert, be ready, is about opening ourselves to God working in us.

José Andrés, an executive chef, used to the high pressure and heat of a top restaurant and a large income, stops, and suddenly opens himself to God, and ends up bringing over 3.5 million meals to the victims of the hurricane in Puerto Rico.

In what ways does Jesus' instruction to keep alert, be ready, reach into your life? Are there activities you are engaged in that are closing you off from what God might be doing in you? That might be a

call to action -- or is it that you just haven't made room? haven't consciously looked around for what God has in store for you?

In our culture, we are always encouraged to rush ahead -- get ready for Christmas right after Halloween. Look busy.

But today Jesus encourages us to take each moment and live in each moment. Believing that there will be an end invites us to live life differently. Christmas can seem exhausting, but only if you think you have to look busy all the time in case God catches you out.

Here, slow down. Reflect, allow your spirit to breathe, be alert for God to prepare you.

Be aware so you can be about God's work, yes. Don't just look busy. Care for one another. Seek Christ in yourself and others

Advent is a time for looking for, and listening for, the promise planted by God within each of us.

I don't know much about end times. But the word from Jesus challenges me to open myself to the possibility of God doing a new thing in me and that changes the present moment. This passage from near the end time of Jesus' life with the disciples, offers us a way to prepare for Jesus to be born in us. His ending opens a doorway to our beginning.