

Adventure of Hope

Advent 1 (Dec. 3, 2023)

32 “But about that day or hour no one knows, neither the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. 33 Beware, keep alert; for you do not know when the time will come. 34 It 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. 35 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, 36 or else he may find you asleep when he comes suddenly. 37 And what I say to you I say to all: Keep awake.” (Mark 13:32-37)

Have you seen the movie, ‘The Way?’ In the movie, Dr. Thomas Avery, an eye doctor, flies to the Pyrenees mountains on the French-Spanish border to retrieve the body of his son Daniel, who died while walking the Camino de Santiago (meaning the Way of St. James), the Spanish pilgrimage route. Tom remembered one of his last, uneasy conversations with Daniel, in which Daniel suggested a father-son trip to Europe together. “What for?” Even though Tom didn’t say so, the rest of his conversation echoed his cynical response to Daniel, “What for?”

Right before flying to the Pyrenees, a priest asked Tom whether he would like to pray with him. Tom’s answer was again, “What for?” but this time with a broken and aching heart. After cremating his son’s body, Tom decides to make the 500-mile pilgrimage himself, taking his son Daniel’s ashes with him. On the walk, Tom places himself in his son’s shoes, and also starts to open up to other pilgrims from around the world, all seeking greater and deeper meaning in their lives. At the end of the movie, Tom was doing a backpacking trip to India (or Nepal) implying that he would continue to do father-son adventures around the world, embracing (or at least trying to understand) his son’s life’s value.

Have you tried backpacking? The beauty and excitement of backpacking is experiencing new things every day. Rather than following the travel agency's schedule, backpackers need to be flexible, embracing the unexpected. Sometimes it requires risk-taking. I’ve travelled around 18 countries and half of them were backpacking. Backpacking is an interesting adventure because we don’t have full information on “what is about to come.”

Today’s sermon title is “Adventure of Hope” and it is not a typo. Advent reminds us that the Christian faith is (and should be) always filled with expectation, hope, and sense of new day because God continues to surprise us creating and bringing something new.

The words adventure and advent are etymological twins. Both Advent and adventure have the meaning of “what is about to come.” They literally mean ‘coming’ or ‘arrival’ in Latin (*ad* means ‘to’ and *venire* means ‘come’). Advent season is an adventurous season, because something is about to come. Something is about to happen.

Today is the first Sunday of Advent, which is the beginning of the Christian Year. A time of expectation and hope because of God’s adventures of coming and becoming *Immanuel* (“God with us”).

Advent is also a season of great joy and tension, because Advent allows us to hope for and notice God’s coming, God’s imminent arrival among us in the midst of the world’s darkness and turmoil. In other words, we await, expect, and prepare for not only the coming of a child in Bethlehem, but also the coming of Christ in the present and the future. In this season, we experience both ‘already’ of divine incarnation through baby Jesus and ‘not yet’ of the divine consummation of all things in Christ at the end of time. Do you see why we call Advent a season of great tension?¹

The coming of Christ in the present and the coming of Christ in the future cannot be separated from each other. We Christians begin our yearly new journey by recalling the end of time, which helps us prioritize what is important to us, opening ourselves to the coming of Jesus in our ‘here and now.’ Slowing down. Pausing. Waiting. In this season of Advent, we are invited to join God’s adventure of coming, living, and breathing with us.

December is often the busiest month, but Advent still invites us to pause, pray (and contemplate) more deeply, and foretaste the mystery of God’s dwelling among us. Advent is also a time to hold on to the thread of hope that comes from God’s unfailing love, no matter how challenging a situation we are in.

There is a painting titled “Hope” by the English painter George Frederic Watts. It pictures a poor woman sitting on a sinking globe. She cannot see because her eyes are bandaged. She is holding a harp (lyre), but all the strings are broken except one. The one last unbroken string is the string of hope. She bends her ear to listen to the faint music. She looks so weary and, at the same time, peaceful. Not only the unbroken string, but she is also a symbol of hope. The artist painted an

¹ New Handbook of Christian Year..

encouraging fact: Even when almost everything is gone or broken, you still can have hope. And if you don't lose hope, you become the embodiment of hope.²



If I summarize what Jesus said in today's scripture reading, it would be: "Wake up and stay awake!" If I summarize all Jesus said about the end time in one sentence, it would still be: "Wake up and stay awake!" (E.g.: Mk. 13:24-37; Mt. 24:36-44; Lk 21:34-36; Rev 3:2-3)

In Mark 13, Jesus talks about the end-time turmoil but encourages his disciples to endure the hardship. Jesus says, "No one knows about the day or hour, neither the angels in heaven, not the Son, but only the Father." The only solution for the disciples to be prepared was to be always on guard and alert. Today's reading encourages us, also, to stay awake! What Jesus wanted us to do was to live every moment like it is the end-time. It doesn't mean to live anxiously. It means to prioritize what is essential in our daily routine and long-term journey.

John Wesley was once asked what he would do if he knew the Lord would return the next day. He said, "I would do what I do now, because I would want the Lord to find me doing what he had appointed," in other words, what God had called on him to do. Wesley knew what was most important to him and didn't lose it. Wesley continuously lived out his "yes" to Jesus when Jesus said to him to keep awake every moment.

We Christians begin our yearly new journey by recalling the end of time, which helps us prioritize what is important to us, opening ourselves to the coming of Jesus in our 'here and now.' In this season of Advent, we are invited to reflect on God's self-giving love through Jesus Christ, who graciously comes to us, is with us, and reminds us that we are God's beloved. We are also called to remember what is important to us in this journey of faith.

Slow down. Pause. Wait.

² The Art Story: <https://www.theartstory.org/artist/watts-george-frederic/artworks/>

Let us continue to cultivate our inner garden, especially in this time of Advent hope. As Henry Nouwen said, “Hope frees us from the need to predict the future and allows us to live in the present, with the deep trust that God will never leave us alone but will fulfill the deepest desire of our heart.”³

Slowing down, pausing, and waiting helps us to wake up and stay awake. As we continue to wait, listen, discern, and act while praying and living out the Kingdom of God in our daily lives, God will continue to help us see the priority in our faith journey, empowering us to live an awakened life. Are you ready to begin a journey of adventure of hope together? And all God’s people say, Amen!

³ Henri Nouwen, Here and Now.