

# **Awake for What?**

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Faith Presbyterian Church, Sierra Vista, AZ  
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Isaiah 64:1-9, Mark 13:23-27, 32-37

## **Introduction**

Today we begin the advent season and a new worship series called Those Who Dream. The Bible is filled with dreamers – both those who have spiritual dreams as messages from God, and the kind of dreamers for a more loving and just world. In our next few weeks of the advent/Christmas/Epiphany celebrations, we will look at the dreamers like the psalmists, John the Baptist, Mary and Elizabeth, Joseph, Simeon and Anna, as well as the outsiders like the shepherds and the Magi.

We hope that this series will help us all – those of us who feel each day is a bit of a dream-like state, for those of us who yearn for a deeper connection to God, and those of us who dream for a better world.

I can't think of a better time for dreaming, since our connection to the dailyness of things is fraying. The other day someone was in the office and mentioning that they needed some material by the "end of June." We all stopped to think a minute, and said together, "November!" Time seems to be elastic during this season of COVID, and even waking up each day is an exercise for some to be a challenge.

## **Situationally a bit bleak**

Our gospel text mirrors times that bear some relation to things today. Mark's call to be awake is set in a time where things are bad. In the preceding scriptures, Mark tells of a time when false messiahs and prophets produce signs and omens to lead people astray. Since scholars believe that this collected work of Mark was written around the time of a war that would destroy Jerusalem, it is clear that it was written for a people in times of upheaval.

We are still living in the kind of world that Mark describes. We know that we can be part of the world's cataclysms, that the pandemics, earthquakes, fires, persecutions, natural disasters, and civil unrest can be at our doorsteps, just as they can in any country. These words were written for a people who had already lived through such times, a testament, perhaps, to their faithfulness in times of trial, but also a warning that they have not ended. The question implied by the passage is how to remain hopeful in a world that desperately needs that hope to live into the future.

This is a gospel for the whole world, not just a few. It is easier to have the kind of theology that lets us off the hook, the kind that says that God will let this world go, will save a remnant only. That kind of theology lets the believer find ways to live for themselves and their own, and not for the world.

The “left behind” notion is a Survivor mentality – better left to reality TV than Christian community. A retired Presbyterian pastor I knew asked folks that believed in “left behind” theology, “If you get taken up by God in the rapture, can I have your stuff?”

Back to hope. Now hope comes in many ways, and the greatest hope comes from times that pierce what is most bleak.

The world is looking for that hope in action. And here at Faith Presbyterian we have a long history of actions and activities to show them. They include:

- Prayer support for the sick and worried.
- Youth given space to explore and act on their faith.
- Food given to those in need at the food pantry.
- The sick and shut-ins visited.
- Money given to support refugees and other mission projects.
- People who reach out to neighbors in need.

If the Christmas story is only for the ideal situations - and the ideal people, then it is not Good News at all. So, we welcome the Christ story into our very imperfect lives, into the dark deep corners where the light can shine, where our brokenness hides, and God’s joy can dwell too.

We as Christians live in a world where many bad things happen to good people. Children today go hungry in this country, one of the wealthiest on earth. We lose family members to illness, death, or relocations. Our jobs disappear to parts unknown.

We experience them just like everybody else, and sometimes we are the perpetrators as well as the victims. But here is where faith comes in: we stay awake for hope, and it is a part of our dreams.

I do know that there are a couple of things we can do. We can raise our heads and we can look at the sun while always keeping our hearts moving forward. And the reason is that even though bad things happen to good people, we trust that God is still in charge. God is behind history. God is embedded in history. And God is marching in front of history. Again and again in scripture, God uses the darkness to kindle the light. God

transforms the tomb of death into the womb of new life.

And so even though bad things happen to good people, we live with the hope and the conviction that God is in charge, and so in the meantime, we turn to Jesus in order to learn how to live in this darkness--how to wait, how to stay alert, how to live moral, disciplined lives in preparation for the moment when we will be needed to bring creation to completion. The world is truly pregnant with possibility – and as the people of God, for better or worse, we are the ones who bear Christ's hope for the world.

Where might we see this hope? Let me tell you a story. There was once a wise teacher. A crowd had gathered around him to hear him teach. Instead he asked a question. "Tell me" he said, "when you are waiting and watching for the morning to come, how can you tell when night has passed and day has come."

The crowd thought hard. One man said "I think it is when you can look at the distant hills and tell whether the animal you can see there is a sheep or a dog." "That is a good answer, but not the one I was thinking of", said the teacher.

Another man said, "Perhaps, then, it is when you can look at a distant tree and tell whether it is a palm tree or a fig tree." "Another good answer, but not the one I was looking for."

"Well," said the crowd, "what is the answer then? How can we tell when the night has passed and the day come?" "You can tell when the night has passed", said the teacher, "when you can look into the eyes of the person next to you and see that they are your brother or sister. Because if you can't see that they are your brother or sister then the night will never pass and darkness will never give way to light."

In this year's strange Advent season, whether it is looking in the eyes of a friend wearing a mask, or through the computer screen on Zoom, I encourage you to see the eyes of your brothers and sisters in Christ, and by that, we can be dreamers who know that darkness will give way to the light.

Friends, let us be awake for Christ, and hope he brings.

Amen.