

“Keep Awake” preached on 12/3/2107

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Here we are in December. We have arrived at Advent, a time of waiting and watching for the Coming of God. And that’s what we spend our time on, right? Waiting and watching for God. No? You’re keeping busy with other things? Let’s take a look at what our scripture passage from the gospel of Mark has to tell us. Jesus is speaking to Peter and Andrew, James and John—two pairs of brothers, his very first disciples. Jesus had asked them to Follow him at the beginning of his ministry. Now, at the end, he is asking them to Watch. But he does so with Apocalyptic words and images. Not what we might be expecting leading up to Christmas. Jesus simply relied upon a stock set of apocalyptic images about the end: sun darkened, stars falling, heavens shaken. This wasn’t meant to terrify but to reassure. All these cosmic forces would be eclipsed by the brilliance of the Son’s final return in power and glory. And there was great relief in hearing this. On that great day, God’s own people would be gathered once more, not forgotten or abandoned but remembered, returned, restored. Those last days would be reliable, following a pattern foretold in ancient scripture.

Jesus was setting the stage for God’s presence no longer being “housed” in the Temple. Something new and different and lifegiving was to come through his death on cross, but the disciples then and us now, need to be alert and awake and ready to catch these glimpses of God. It’s not about glimpsing the end of the ages. It’s about here and now.

Jesus has already told us all we need to know. The trials of this age? Don’t fear them, for that’s just the pattern of our weary world. And the last day, the end of the age? Don’t fear that, either, for God holds it securely for our benefit. So we can look out, keep alert, *watch*. Open your eyes, waken your hearts, attune your bodies to what is around you, that you may claim witness to God’s presence in the simple and miraculous.

So watch—honestly, thoroughly, painfully. See what is happening around you and tell that truth. Watch the arrests, the abuse, the harm to your neighbor, and be silent no more. And then, when

that's done, watch some more—deeply, shrewdly, joyfully. Look for signs of God's ways in our midst, glimpses of mercy, forgiveness, hope, and then share what you see.

Ann Weems does a wonderful job relaying this message in her poem, *The Coming of God*:

### **The Coming of God by Ann Weems**

Our God is the One who comes to us  
in a burning bush,  
in an angel's song,  
in a newborn child.

Our God is the One who cannot be found  
locked in the church,  
not even in the sanctuary.

Our God will be where God will be  
with no constraints,  
no predictability.

Our God lives where our God lives,  
and the destruction has no power  
and even death cannot stop  
the living.

Our God will be born where God will be born,  
but there is no place to look for the One who comes to us.

When God is ready  
God will come  
even to a godforsaken place  
like a stable in Bethlehem.

Watch...  
for you know not when  
God comes.  
Watch, that you might be found  
whenever  
wherever  
God comes.

So where will you look for God this Advent season? Maybe not in just the obvious places.

I want to share with you a few of the places I saw God at work during my trip to Pakistan with the Presbyterian Education Board of Pakistan (or PEB):

- I saw God in the faces of children excited about learning – from preschoolers learning phonics to high school students in a chemistry lab to middle school students studying history.
- God’s presence was felt in the careful attention of the PEB staff – giving of their time, keeping us safe and sharing in the journey with us.
- I felt God’s presence when we dedicated the generous gift of the father of two of the women who went on the trip with me. He had been on a previous trip and given a very generous donation to build a second floor onto the boy’s school in Sangla Hill that will offer students on a waiting list a chance to get a good education.
- I saw God in the faces of children with disabilities that came and sang and anthem during a worship service at Saint Andrew’s Presbyterian Church. And God was there with the warm welcome they received as they danced and praised God.
- I felt God’s presence when I met with other Presbyterian ministers – all of them men – and heard about their history, their struggles, their worries as well as their joys and hope.
- God was present as I spoke with the girls and boys at the PEB Science Fair, and they were proud and excited to share their projects, their display boards, their experiments and their speeches – ALL in English!
- As I handed out the socks we collected at APC to 180 students at the Martinpur school, the children were glad and thankful, and I was excited to know these gifts were just the beginning of a relationship with those children, that school, and that community – and I felt God’s loving presence and hope.

I share these with you today, because for me, they are recent and relevant. But there have been just as many God moments here in this sanctuary, at the hospital, in people’s homes, on retreats ... and today as we celebrate both the sacraments -

baptism and communion, I encourage you to look for and be open to God's presence in our midst.

Let me close with a poem by Steve Garnaas-Holmes, entitled "Unfolding Light"

God of the small, the subtle, the unimportant,  
God of the vague, the dark, the ambiguous,  
open my heart to your coming.

Open my eyes to the little signs,  
my ears to the soft murmurs.

Slow me down to listen and hear.

Keep me low to look and see.

Awaken me to the losses that are blessings,  
the wounds that are openings,  
the weaknesses that are empty mangers.

Wake me from the stupor of busyness,  
the daze of desire,

to witness your drawing near,

to behold your presence,

even in this ordinary moment,

this feeble prayer,

this beating heart.

May each one of us be on the lookout for God. Stay Awake,  
ready for the Coming of God! Amen.