

FAITH @ HOME

Week of November 29, 2020

First Sunday of Advent

ADULT AND SMALL CHILD

READ: Mark 13:24-37

REFLECT: This Sunday marks the beginning of Advent: A season of anticipation as we prepare for the birth of Jesus. Churches who read the selected scriptures from the lectionary read words attributed to Jesus about the unexpected time of his coming. Within the passage are the lines: “Keep awake therefore, for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming.”

Have you ever missed something important or fun because you slept through it or wasn't paying attention? What kinds of things do new parents have to do to prepare for the arrival of a new baby? Why does Jesus tell us to “Keep awake?” What are we staying awake for?

RESPOND: Create a comic strip that shows how you would prepare to welcome Jesus into the world. Include particular details related to shelter, food, and love. You can use words and/or images.

ABOUT OUR CONTRIBUTOR: ROGER HUTCHISON



Roger Hutchison is the Director of Christian Formation and Parish Life at Palmer Memorial Episcopal Church in Houston. An artist who paints with children and adults in a variety of contexts, he is the author of several books including *Jesus: God Among Us*, *The Painting Table*, and *The Very Best Day*. Roger serves as the chair of the Forma Council and is a member of the National Association of Grieving Children and the Society of Children's Book Writers and Illustrators. He lives with his family outside of Houston, Texas.

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First Sunday of Advent

ADULT AND ELEMENTARY

READ: Mark 13:24-37

REFLECT: If you've ever walked through the woods or a park on a windy autumn day, you will notice the shapes and colors of the ground beneath your feet and the leaves crunching softly. In the air the chill pricks at your cheeks. The change from being in the warmth of indoors to the swirling breezy woods reminds me of how everything passes away as the seasons change. We move from one day to the next day, ending some activities and beginning new ones as we go.

In this Gospel reading from Mark, Jesus reminds us that his words will not pass away. They will remain constant, unchanging, providing hope and guidance. Jesus also talks about being ready; being watchful. He reminds us to keep awake. The Kingdom of Heaven is coming.

If you've ever tried to keep awake waiting for something special to happen, you know what Jesus is talking about. He says "the master could come and surprise you at any time." And we know that God does to and surprise us when we least expect it. This year maybe we were all caught sleeping in the early spring and God surprised us with a change of seasons. Everything changed very quickly – kind of like that first windy autumn day.

RESPOND: Go outside and sit in the yard for a while or take a slow walk in the park. Stay out as long as you can and be as quiet as you can. Listen to the sounds around you and notice the shapes and colors. What does the air feel like on your skin? In Japan this is called a "forest bath." It is a way of relaxing, letting go of stress and coming a little closer to the Kingdom. How did it make you feel?

ABOUT OUR CONTRIBUTOR: LISA PUCCIO



Lisa is the Coordinator for Special Needs Worship and Family Formation at St. Andrew's Episcopal Church in Houston, Texas. Lisa leads Rhythms of Grace Houston, a weekly worship service for special needs families, and oversees ministries for children and parents at St. Andrew's. She has worked in parish ministry since 2002, served two terms as vice president of Forma, and is a member of the diocesan formation advisory committee in the Diocese of Texas. Lisa and her husband Mike have four grown children.

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First Sunday of Advent

ADULT AND YOUTH

READ: Mark 13:24-37

REFLECT: Keep awake. Keep alert. Advent usually is the season during the year that we wait for the coming of Christ. This reading from Mark is fascinating to me because it happens after the birth of Jesus, Jesus calling the disciples, and Jesus' arrival in Jerusalem with much fanfare. Jesus is speaking to his disciples about the end of a time of suffering. He preaches that the Son of Man will come to earth from heaven. It feels a bit apocalyptic, doesn't it? Then Jesus uses a fig tree as a metaphor to represent the changes of seasons, time, and even generations. Jesus tells us that even as life as we know it changes, his words will not go away. The reading then ends with a parable about waiting for the Son of Man.

All three of the sections of this reading can be viewed as Jesus warning the disciples about the end of times with the return of the Son of Man to the world. In a lot of ways, this should reinforce the idea of waiting for Christ during this season of Advent. Yes, we will celebrate the birth of Christ on December 25th, but early Christians would tell us that Christ could arrive any day at any time. How will you keep awake and wait for Christ?

RESPOND: What does waiting look like for you? This Advent, pick 5 to 10 minutes each day to sit and "wait" for Christ. That may include a Scripture reading that reminds you to "keep awake," or a song that reminds you of your relationship with God. During that time, you may want to pray to God and let God know you are open to God's revelations. Allow yourself to slow down and look for God's thumbprints on our world and your life.

ABOUT OUR CONTRIBUTOR: WALLACE BENTON



Wallace Benton serves as the Assistant to the Rector for Youth Ministries at St. David's Episcopal Church in Roswell, GA. He's been fortunate to have grown up in the Episcopal Church and became interested in youth ministry after volunteering with his former youth program after college. Wallace has worked diocesan retreats and activities such as New Beginnings and Happening. Currently, he is the lay director for New Beginnings in the Diocese of Atlanta. He is also a member of the Episcopal Youth Ministry in ATL podcast (which you should check out immediately!)

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Week of November 29, 2020

First Sunday of Advent

ADULT AND ADULT

READ: Mark 14:24-37

REFLECT: Living through a pandemic can certainly enrich our vision of Biblical stories that talk about the end of times. Through the last months, our hearts have felt like the sun has darkened, and the ground has shaken within ourselves. We have woken up to harsh realities. Realities that used to feel like distant foreign stories but have now turned into our daily bread. I find myself many times, just closing my eyes, as if I could make them go away, and the thoughts, the emotions, the overwhelm-ness of it all sits in my heart, and I am left doing the only thing I can do: pray.

But prayer is no small thing either. In the face of a reality where children are going hungry, where systemic racism prevails, and immigrants cannot afford health care, praying helps me stay awake in a way that is hopeful and constructive. If God has allowed us to awake to such realities, it must mean there is a purpose for us in them. Let us pray that God will show us a way in which we can be helpful, part of the solution, part of the spreading of good news during all this darkness. “Stay awake!” says Jesus, but to stay awake we need to be doing something; otherwise, we will easily go back to sleep.

RESPOND: What reality have you awoken to during this pandemic? I invite you to pray today and as you pray, do not be afraid to ask God to show you more, and show you the way and empower you to respond to this reality. Do not be afraid to remain awake, and be a part of it, be the part that brings good news to the people living in that reality.

ABOUT OUR CONTRIBUTOR: YURI RODRIGUEZ



Yuri Rodriguez is a seminarian at Sewanee, the University of the South. She is from the Diocese of Indianapolis. Yuri is also an artist, singer, and educator who specializes in Latin American Music and Culture.

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