

December 3, 2017

Keep Awake!

Mark 13:24-37

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Eunice's English teacher recently published a new book and in her profile she describes her husband as a 'patient husband.' After reading her profile, Esther commented, "Like her husband, you should be a patient husband as well." You may think I am a patient pastor, and I might be a patient pastor. But Esther doesn't think I am a patient husband.

What about you? Do you think that you are a patient person? Are you one of those people whose blood pressure rises when you are in a long line at the check-out counter of your favorite grocery store? And it gets worse after an already long wait, the person at the front of the line needs a price check on an unmarked item. Yet, waiting is a central part of life. We spend a huge chunk of our lives waiting.

Waiting is one of the Bible's long time themes. Long ago the Psalmist cried out: *"How long, O LORD? Will you forget me forever? How long will you hide your face from me? How long must I bear pain in my soul, and have sorrow in my heart all day long?"* (Ps. 31:1-2)

Today's text talks about waiting for God! Jesus tells his followers to stay alert and cautions them to be watchful as they wait for his return. Waiting is a major thing in the routine of our lives. There is no such thing as a life without waiting. It is not whether we are going to go through a lot of waiting in our lives, but how we are going to wait.

Today, we are living in the speed age. Fast transportation, fast telecommunication, and fast food put us in a faster life style. Especially the internet pushes our society into the speed age. We could find a lot of information through "Google" search. If it takes a long time to access a website, we easily click "stop" and try to find another website. We need to adapt to the speed age in order to survive in the radically changing society. On the other hand, we are losing the virtue of patience and the characteristic of being steadfast in our daily lives.

South Korean people often say, *"ppali, ppali"* which means "hurry up and hurry up!" This *"ppali, ppali"* personality of Korean people causes the Korean society and economy to develop rapidly. At the time of the Korean War, Korea was one of the poorest countries (119th out of 120 countries) in the world. However, with the *"ppali, ppali"* spirit, Korean people have made the economic miracle and Korea became the world's 11th wealthiest country. Korea is also a leading country in the I.T. industry. Many Korean people emphasize

how fast we can finish a project, rather than how well or how safely we can finish it. This fast oriented attitude causes many big accidents, such as collapsing buildings and bridges in Korea. 22 years ago, a five-story department store collapsed and several months later one of the main bridges in Seoul also collapsed during rush hour. Many people were killed in the accidents at that time. We need to have a time to pause and think before doing or acting on something. We need to wait for others, for the next chance, and for the future.

Today's texts deal with the coming of the end of time. The end is coming. Science tells us this, experience tells us this, and the scriptures tell us this. And it will not be some temporary system failure. Rather it will be a complete crash - a crash that will bring a new heaven and a new earth. The end is coming to each one of us individually, and it is coming to all of us together at the same time to the whole world. It might be sooner or later, but it is coming.

The season of Advent is about the coming of the Lord, the coming of the Lord as a babe in a manger in Bethlehem, and the coming of the Lord as a judge in power and might. People have always been curious and interested in the end of the world. In Jesus' time they wanted to know when the end was going to come. The "Left Behind" series fictionally deals with this question. But the Gospel reveals that Jesus is not interested in encouraging speculation: *But about that day or hour no one knows, only the Father.* (Mark 13:32). Instead, we are to put our efforts into living an expectant life by keeping alert and watchful.

Advent is a good time to develop new relationships with people outside our walls. Advent calls us to an abundant life that is more spiritual and less material. It invites us to put our faith and trust in God's mercy and divine intervention. It compels us to have a heart for truth, mercy, and justice.

Immanuel means "God with us" in a relationship that will totally transform us. As Israel longed for Messiah to come and fulfill their hopes and dreams, so each one of us has a place within that longs for the coming of the Lord. This season of Advent is a time when we open our hearts and wait for the coming of the Lord in our spirits. Therefore, during Advent we not only celebrate the incarnation, but reflect on how it is that Christ is 'near, at the very gates' in every moment of our lives. Today's text tells an excellent counsel for the season: "Therefore keep awake!"

Prayer is a wake-up call. When we keep praying and have a conversation with God regularly, we can realize that God is with us and know what God's will is for us. Let us take time to reflect in prayer during this season of waiting and during communion. Today Jesus is saying to us, "Wake up." "Don't fall asleep." "You keep awake. Wake up."