

From the Rector's Study, the Rev. Bryce Sangster
Sunday, December 3rd, 2023, Advent I
Isaiah 64:1-9, Psalm 80:1-7, 16-18, 1 Corinthians 1:3-9, Mark 13:24-37

Here we have Jesus talking about heaven and earth will pass away but his words will not. And he also talks about staying awake. I don't think this is about avoiding sleep. What does this mean?

There are probably many ways of interpreting this. That there will be changes, and life and the world will not stay the same. And so, a quick answer in staying awake, is being aware of the changes and not being caught by surprise. Maybe it's not about the extremes, being either awake or asleep, but being perhaps half asleep, or going through life sleepwalking.

Maybe it has to do with intentionality and seeing where we are going and making those decisions deliberately and with purpose. The word which comes to mind is discernment. There was a question that came out of preparation for a rural ministry gathering a few years ago. The question was, What traditions and practices do we keep and what do we blow up?

God calls us to discern which is which and staying awake to make those decisions or we will keep what we should move beyond and throw away what has value for us going forward.

The idea then is what is the plan? What are we working towards? If not, we're just going through the motions.

If we think it is just for the elite and those in charge, Jesus talks about gathering his elect from the four winds from the ends of the earth to the ends of heaven. Yes, we can think that the use of the word elect eliminates us, but from the four winds and from the ends on the earth as the feeling of including all of us. Yes, this may be a bit of a paradox, but I think it has more to do with all of us than only a select few.

When I was in a parish north of Montreal, I meet a number of parishioners who had been living in Montreal and had a summer cottage in the Laurentians north Of Montreal. When it came time for them to retire, they left their place in Montreal and move permanently to the cottage in the Laurentians. Things were great for them for a while, but when one of them got sick or even died, living in that cottage in the Laurentians became a hardship for various reasons. Although there was enjoyment

of life in the present, there wasn't the anticipation of the risk. So it wasn't about moving out of Montreal to the cottage on a permanent basis, it was waiting too long to have an alternate plan in place as time went by.

But it's not all about bad news and anticipating the worst, but also where we can find hope. We often miss the places of hope in our lives and the world around us.

I told this story before, but it bears repeating. The story of the workshop in New Richmond, Quebec, members leaders the Anglican church and English community advocates. The workshop facilitator put long strips of brown paper on three of the walls in the hall where the workshop was held. On the 1st wall we were to put what was happening or had happened in our churches and the communities where the churches were located. On the 2nd wall we were deposited what was happening what happened in the world. On the 3rd wall we were to put events in our lives.

The churches and their communities were in decline, and the events in the world were all over the map, good and bad news. But interestingly, the group's personal lives were filled with events of joy and hope. Marriages and children, graduation from university and motorcycle accident. Hope and joy obviously, but the motorcycle accident shows a willingness to risk. Without hope and joy, there is no willingness to risk, and where do we find this hope and joy?

It seems to be more often than not within and around us in the power of the Holy Spirit.

And isn't this what Advent is all about: an anticipation and hope for the Joy of Christmas?

Amen

The Lord bless you and watch over you,
the Lord make his face shine upon you
and be gracious to you,
the Lord look kindly on you
and give you peace;
and the blessing ...