

Advent 1
Year B 2020
Mark 13:24:37

Come Holy Spirit, give life to my words.

In the name of God, creator, redeemer and giver of life.

Amen.

Beware, keep awake, stay alert on the watch.

The intersection of our spiritual lives
and present day realities it would seem.

Today we begin our year of journeying
with the Gospel of Mark on this first
Sunday of Advent.

Hard to believe we are already to Advent
as our time warp continues in these unsettled times.

But Mark will be a good companion for us
as his message is always:

Beware, keep alert,
for you do not know when the time will come.

Very prudent advice for us in this time.

In the words of commentator Courtney Buggs:

Jesus' call is to lose sleep as one endeavors to participate in the work of the Divine.

Our call is to vigilance in a time of chaotic events.

Events, which on the one hand are bringing forth long subverted issues of racial injustice, and on the other, issues of struggles in the halls of power.

Not unlike the times referenced in today's reading from Mark.

Jesus' insistent call is about being at work in the world in which we are centered.

Jesus' command to "keep awake" is interpreted as the human struggle between staying awake and falling asleep.

That moment of haziness when one loses track of wakefulness and slides into the peace of sleep.

Sleep which cocoons us from reality.

The reality of need, suffering, oppression and injustice at work in the world around us, even as we slumber.

This was and is Jesus' message as revealed in today's gospel reading.

Do not be distracted.

Do not become complacent.

Stay the course.

There is much work to do in the world around us while we can't be together physically.

We are still able to effect positive change in a time in history which will live on well beyond our time.

Jesus calls us to watch and work on two fronts, the spiritual and the communal.

We are living in a time in which the opportunity to effectuate great societal and political change is emerging all around us.

What we learn from the Gospel of Mark is that this is our spiritual practice.

We hear from Jesus that the two cannot be separated, one informs the other.

From Ched Myers' *Binding the Strong Man*, a political reading of Mark's story of Jesus:

Mark calls the discipleship community to live in history with open eyes, to look deep into present events, beyond the conflicting claims of those vying for power.

They must search for and attack the very roots of violence and oppression that hold the human story hostage.

This is Jesus' call to us.

This is discipleship.

Discipleship in the time of pandemic.

Discipleship in a time of socio-political upheaval.

What we have learned
over the course of these last months
is enough to keep us up every night with worry
for the rest of our lives.

But that is not how Jesus would like us to respond.

To be sure, he calls us to be alert, watchful
but not because we are immobilized by fear.

No, what we hear from Jesus
in the Gospel of Mark
is that we are to be aware of oppression and injustice
and ACT to change those systems
which exist solely for that purpose.

Even though we can't be together in church,
with family or friends,
there are many ways in which
we can join in the work to effectuate change.

We can continue to support our favorite organizations
that are on the front lines in the effort
to even the playing field for all.

We can educate ourselves about the systemic issues which have and continue to aid and support the powerful at the expense of the disenfranchised.

Pray.

Yes pray.

We can pray individually, pray in community, and we can encourage our family and friends to pray in whatever way is most comfortable for them.

Just as it was so for the disciples following Jesus, there is plenty to be done.

There is still much work to do to make known the Kingdom that Jesus ushered in.

We have what we need to become engaged in bringing about the fullness of that vision.

We have the vision and knowledge of the life of Jesus.

We have the Scriptures which help to inform our mission.

We have our community.

And we have each other, the community of St. Andrew's.

Jesus does not ask us to single handedly attempt to accomplish all that needs attention.

The example Jesus set for us shows us
that only when we work together,
each taking action in the area to which they are called,
using the gifts each has been given,
will the change we so desperately need begin.

My brothers and sisters,
we have the means by which
we can attack and overcome
the roots of violence and oppression
that hold the human story hostage.

I wonder,
are we willing to live into Jesus' call to discipleship?