

Hope Awakens, Will You?

Psalm 122; Romans 13: 11-14

Every week, someone calls Karen or I, perhaps the chair of the board or the chair of worship, and says, ‘I think that we are talking too much about...’ It can be any topic but most often it is because we have no choice. We follow what's called a Lectionary. Every three years, we follow this line of walking through the Bible. Every Sunday, four readings are chosen from different parts of the Bible and offered up as choices for ministers, pastors, priests. If we went down to the Catholic Church today or walked the other way to the Anglicans or a little bit south to the Presbyterians, more than likely, we would be hearing Romans chapter 13, verses 11 to 14.

I'm getting that out of the way because some of you think we've picked this scripture because it was Black Friday on Friday and you're thinking: I know I indulged a little bit. If you're like me there might have been a little *dissipation* of your resources (meaning resources went out of my wallet.) And so, I bring you back from the joys of getting ready for the holiday for a moment with Paul. “Make sure that you do not get exhausted, so absorbed in taking care of all your day by day obligations that you lose track of time; or that through the exhaustion you doze off.”¹

Advent is a season where we are being asked to stay awake, to wait and to keep an eye out for what God is doing. For God truly is “putting the finishing touches on the work of salvation, that he began when we first believed”; that the Spirit began when She first entered our lungs. We must not squander a minute.

Now, please note I am not saying your job is to *not* rest; your job is to rest, *sometimes*. Sometimes being able to see God working means resting. However, it also means doing the “work” of preparing and looking ahead. I'm going to start with the obvious reason to look ahead and prepare, something you might do yourselves.

If you get invited to a wonderful Christmas party and you know there is going to be one table of cheese and one table of chocolate and then a sideboard of shortbread: prepare in advance. Don't indulge the night before in cheap shortbread alone in your house. Shortbread should be enjoyed when it is rich- meaning in good company as well as good quality. Another example is the Christmas chocolate boxes. You might feel like you want to relax and just have that chocolate

¹ Today we are using *The Message*, a paraphrased Bible from Eugene Peterson, to hear Paul.

without sharing with anyone at the office. Or you could look ahead and think about how fun it will be to sit around that table with others to watch them try different chocolates before you try yours.

Indulgences that come with Christmas do not need to be bad; they do need to be measured and balanced. I use imagining calories and tummy aches to prepare you for some of the other things I invite you to prepare for. For, just as you need to know to have a salad before you go to the Gowers' house (because there will be probably a plate in shortbread there), you also must look at the whole Advent and Christmas season like this. I will use Paul's list to help us. Remember Paul was not writing to made up people. Paul lived and worked among the people he was preaching to. And so, what he saw amongst them and what he knew of his own heart is what he preached about.

We must not squander these precious daylight hours. Okay, for Paul it was a little different, but I did the math folks, and we are down to 4 weeks where the sun is only up for 8 hours a day! Do not waste the daylight hours. Even *I* do not nap at this time of year though I love naps. I just go to bed early because the sun's down anyway.

Paul invites us not to squander our resources in frivolity and indulgence. Look at the season ahead for you. Where are the places where you would predict that you would indulge too much? When will your love of making sure you looked wonderful (or partake in beverages) not be the most important thing to think about? Whether it be at the office party, a neighbour's gathering, or perhaps the gathering after something at church - before you go, ponder what you want to make of that event. Do you want it to be filled with the building of good relationships and the sharing of fun or do you want it to be a foggy event that you look back later and wonder what happened?

Paul talks also about the squandering of precious resources. That fancy word he uses is dissipation. I think about all the times we can give away the resources of our time and talents. For example, we can stay up late at night worrying that the presents must *look* perfect forgetting that the next day we will be in the presence of our loved ones and we don't want to be sleepy just because we stayed up late. That wrapping paper is only going to last a second in their hands, but your time with them that day that is gold.

You can also look ahead at what's going to be hard this Christmas. Is this going to be a Christmas where, like my parents, both your daughters are skedaddling (getting out of town). We try and rotate it, so they always have one of us at home, but this year is just one of those years. Christmas morning, they will get up and have a wonderful day and they won't have their daughters around. They need to prepare ahead so that that day can be a romantic one. One where they don't mope around, but rather do something for one another- not because they're going to deny they miss us (I think they're going to miss us) but because while they're missing us, they're still called to live and to love.

I remember my first Christmas day alone. Ministers never have Christmas Eve alone, but Christmas Day sometimes found me flying home from wherever I was doing ministry. So, I would be alone in my home in the morning, quite alone in the airport during the day, and get home late,

late at night to a bleary-eyed Dad who'd come to pick me up at the airport. If I hadn't prepared for that day my loneliness could have taken me anywhere. Bad decisions such as having a plain old self pity party with chocolate! Instead I planned it out. What would it be like to take a walk in the sunrise on Christmas morning? I never tried it. What would it be like to see who else is out and about and alone and take them candy canes? What was the book that I got from my mom last Christmas that I really want to have read because she will want to talk about it?

We need to remember that this season of Advent is the time to prepare ourselves for Christ and what Christ means for us. If for you Christ is a friend, then prepare your home as you would for a friend. If this Christmas, you need Christ the Redeemer to come and lift up the despair in your life then prepare for Christmas season where you ask for help. Ask your friends to call you on Christmas Day because you don't know how you will be feeling.

Perhaps this Christmas, at whatever gathering you are at, will spend the whole night looking for someone...like the first Christmas after Grandma passed away and you keep looking over your shoulder. (In my case for the smell of burnt carrot. With no Grandma Sinclair, I found out that carrots are orange even after you cook them.) So, instead of just spending the whole night looking over your shoulder, prepare a place for your loved one at your table. Acknowledge the emptiness that is there and light a candle and remember: they are there, they just are there in a different way. Come to church for whichever service will feed your soul. Go for a walk yes even when it's cold out!

Let us prepare our hearts and minds; for a young woman is going to give birth and turn the whole world upside down. Thanks be to God!