

## **Advent 1 November 27, 2022**

### **Romans 13:11-14:Matthew 24:36-44**

In Matthew 28:1-7, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary, two of the women who follow Jesus from a distance during his trial and execution, come to the tomb at dawn on the Sabbath after his death. Mark tells us they come to anoint his body for burial, but Matthew says nothing of this motive. The angel who rolls away the stone from the tomb knows they have come to look for Jesus (28:5), who had announced that he would rise after three days. They have come to watch it happen. They are rewarded with a front row view of the empty tomb and, moments later, a meeting with the risen Lord himself (28:8-10). They have put themselves where they can see what God is doing. They are watching, and they are ready!

We do not know the day or hour that Jesus will come again. Even Jesus doesn't know when it will be. So, any speculation about it really is a waste of time and borders on idolatry. It is one of the mysteries that Martin Luther reminds us we cannot know.

What we are to do, what we can do, is to keep awake- be vigilant. To watch for the signs of God's presence. And, as we are told in the next part of this discourse to the disciples, to be about the work that Jesus has called us to. The work

summarized in the great commission that Jesus gives at the end of the gospel. Go, baptize, teach, tell – everyone.

But how do we know what to look for? How do we know what we are called to do?

We know this as we know the God who has come to us in Jesus Christ. And the place we know to find that is in scripture. This is God's Word to us, God's letter, God's email, (sorry, it's longer than a tweet- God has a lot to say) It is God's way of saying this is who I am, what I am about, and who I have created you to be.

We know how to do this. How do you know who to pick for your fantasy league? How this little thing you saw in the Star Wars series *Andor*, fits into the wider lore of Star Wars? What that joke or saying refers to?

We know these things because we have immersed ourselves in studying it, either intentionally or just by how we live. I know the gentlemen in my confirmation class can speak in great detail about the best fantasy league picks because they are immersed in that world. Youth and younger adults know the latest slang because that is their sub-culture. They don't work at it because it is always there. They just know it because they are always around it.

We have the capacity to do this. To become so attuned to this God who has come to us in Jesus, that we can begin to see more clearly how that God is already active in the world. So that we can, like Mary Magdalene and the other Mary, place ourselves in positions to see God at work.

This is why I am inviting you to join me in reading through the Bible in a year beginning today. So that, regardless of whether we have read this story of God's pursuit of God's people many times or never cracked it at all, we might awaken ourselves to what the creator of all that exists is like, how this God works in our world, and what our calling is in relationship to that. So that we might keep awake.

One author wrote that the vocation of modern disciples is still to watch for the signs of God's presence in power. But we remember from last week what that power looks like. It is the power that is revealed through the cross and the resurrection. Power revealed in healing the sick, standing with the broken and suffering, bringing sight to the blind and hearing to the deaf. It's not power (clenched fist), it is power (open hand).

In the final parable of this sermon, Jesus tells his disciples that the Son of Man/Judge is present among precisely those who are sick, broken, suffering (25:31-46). This is where we, too, go to see what God is doing. How God is still transforming this world. This is also how we meet God- for as Jesus promises us in that

passage- when we feed the hungry, heal the sick, visit those in prison- we do it to him. The eyes of Jesus look back at us from those who are most in need when we as followers of Christ meet those basic needs.

I like darkness, it can be comforting, like a blanket wrapped around me. But it can also be oppressive, isolating, scary. When talking about that feeling within us it can pull us out of relationship with others.

Darkness is the feeling we have when we pay attention and consider the suffering and death caused by the war in Ukraine. Where at least 7,000 civilians have been killed and around 100,000 soldiers killed and wounded on each side. When we consider the mass shootings this past week that killed five in Colorado Springs, six in Chesapeake, Virginia and the fact that this year will be the third in a row with over 600 mass shootings defined as incidences when there are a minimum of four victims shot, either injured or killed. About 2 a day.

It is this darkness, of killing one another, of hatred, anger, quarrelling and jealousy that Paul reminds us that Jesus has come to dispel. Jesus is not only the Son of God, but the Sun of God. Bringing light and life to all people.

The coming again of Jesus is like the break of morning after a long night. A moment of hope, of renewal, a deep breath of fresh air. That moment is one we long for, pray for, hope for.

And- we can experience a foretaste of that moment now- when we come to this table and receive the very body and blood of that Jesus who died so that we might live freed from bondage to all those things. A bit of bread, a sip of wine that warms our insides with the light of Christ.

We can experience a foretaste of that moment now. When we set aside things of that personal and societal darkness- hatred, war, murder, hunger, anger, lust, jealousy, addiction- and clothe ourselves again in Jesus Christ. When we dip again in the waters of baptism and wash off the worst of the world. When we plunge into those waters and arise refreshed, made new, clothed in Jesus Christ.

We in the northern hemisphere are living in a time of physical darkness, waiting for the return of the light. We also live in the darkness of the world as it is. Waiting for the return of the light of Christ. The dawn of a new day, a new age.

Let us help one another keep awake. Let us help one another look for where the power of Christ is at work in the world. Let us help one another lay aside the works of the darkness and live as people of the light. To daily clothe ourselves in Christ and go

forth as beacons of his glory shining in the world. So that when he does come again, my Lord, what a morning that will be, he might find us living as what we are- disciples of Emmanuel- God with us.