

# Awake

Isaiah 2:1-5    Romans 13:11-14

*Preached by Richard Bolin at Culver-Palms United Methodist Church*

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Happy New Year!

Did you have a New Year's Eve party last night? I suppose you didn't even stay up 'til midnight to watch the festivities on television.

Well, you didn't miss much, because there weren't any New Year's Eve festivities on TV last night. Those will be on December 31st, which is the correct date for New Year's Eve according to the secular calendar. But the Church's calendar says that the Christian year begins on the first Sunday of Advent, which is four Sundays before Christmas Day, which is today.

Clearly, there is some conflict between the Christian calendar and the secular calendar. There is more to that conflict than the fact that one starts a month earlier. There is also a difference of character, a difference in the way the New Year is observed.

Nelson Thayer has said that the secular calendar ends with over-indulgence and begins with a hangover. Certainly a number of people anticipate that by the end of December they will be ready for a well-deserved collapse. But the Christian year offers an alternative. Instead of ending the year with over-indulgence and beginning with a hangover, the Christian year suggests that we begin the year today in a quiet, purposeful manner. If we will observe the traditional themes of Advent, then December may become for us a time of gradually growing light rather a recipe for exhaustion.

So this Advent season wake up, walk in the light, and be the change that God has promised for our world.

"Besides this, you know what time it is, how it is now the moment for you to wake from sleep." (Romans 13:11)

That sounds just like my mother! Do you suppose Paul ever had to deal with getting children up in time to go to school?

Are you a morning person, or a night person? I aspire to be a morning person. Early to bed and early to rise always sounded like good advice to me. When a family recalled their father's admonition that an hour of sleep before midnight was worth 2 after midnight, I was impressed with his wisdom. But at 10 or 11 at night my energy level seems to be just revving up. When my wife's alarm sounds at 5:30 a.m. I pull the covers tighter around my neck and give thanks that I don't have to get up that early.

I wonder how common it is for morning persons to marry night persons? And does that also carry over to persons who are always running behind being married to persons who cannot stand being late?

"You know what time it is," says Paul, "how it is now the moment for you to wake from sleep." Wake up! Paul does not want us to be late, like this couple in the film, "License to Wed."

**Film clip** [*The one-minute clip shows a couple arriving late to church, trying to come in the back unnoticed. But the pastor interrupts his prayer with the line, "Wow! Look who decided to show!" As everyone turns to look, the choir does an energetic quick anthem with the words "You're late! You're late. God's on time. But you are very late!"*]

“God is on time, but you are very late!”

That is a different way of looking at Advent. Advent is an in between time. We prepare to celebrate what God has done in the past, and we anticipate what God is going to do in the future. Advent is about anticipating, waiting and preparing for first coming of Jesus in Bethlehem. And Advent applies that same sense of anticipation and preparation to the future coming of Jesus to establish God’s reign on earth. Through the ages people have asked, “How long, O Lord?” When will the promises be fulfilled? When will the Angel’s song proclaim peace on earth and God’s reconciling good will to all creation become a reality? But listen again to what Isaiah and Paul are telling us. The truth is that God is on time, but we are very late.

The people who lived prior to Jesus had many hopes that they pinned on the coming of the Messiah. Isaiah lifted up those hopes: "God shall judge between the nations, and shall arbitrate for many peoples, and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more.... Come, let us walk in the light of the Lord."

Notice how Isaiah changes the tense from future to present. “They shall beat their swords into plowshares” and then, “Come, let us walk in the light of the Lord.” Isaiah lived in a violent age, not unlike our own. He lifted up before the people a vision of an age to come, God’s age, when nations would no longer train for war. The vision he placed before the people was intended to impact their present lives. "Come, **[now]** let us walk in the light of the Lord." In God’s light we can see the vision, and it changes the way we walk today!

With the Messiah would come peace, justice, health, wholeness, new life. The Messiah has come, but we still await the completion of all those promises. We hope as they hoped, and we rejoice in the proclamation that the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ is the first fruits of this harvest. Advent is not simply a time to look back at a past event, but to look forward just as people long ago looked to the future with hope.

And yet, that does not mean that, looking forward to the future, we should ignore the present. In fact the opposite is true. The possibility of God’s reign breaking into our lives at any moment emphasizes the importance of the present.

So Paul writes to the Romans: “You know what time it is, how it is now the moment for you to wake from sleep. For salvation is nearer to us now than when we became believers; the night is far gone, the day is near. Let us then lay aside the works of darkness and put on the armor of light; let us live honorably as in the day...” (Romans 13:11-13)

Paul’s words have the same future-present tension that we found in Isaiah. “The night is far gone” – not all the way gone – “the day is near” – it is not here yet, but it is near. So what are we to do right now? “Put on the armor of light ... live honorably as in the day.”

Wake up! Walk in the light. Be the change that God intends for our world. God is on time, but we are very late.

We do not have the option of living as if we could depend upon tomorrow being like today. We are called to live this moment with a sense of urgency, for even now God is transforming our reality.

The scriptures are counter-cultural when it comes to our understanding of time. We live in a world of clocks and calendars, always measuring the time left until the next important event. But while we are counting minutes and centuries, God’s holy moments are ever upon us.

Like people long ago who waited and hoped for the birth of a savior, we wait and hope for the fulfillment of all that God has promised. We wait for the light of God to illumine the

world. We hope for peace. What do we do while we wait? We show forth God's light in our lives. We work for peace. We immerse ourselves in all the possibility that God has given this day.

Wake up! Walk in the light. Be the change that God intends for our world. Amen.