

November 28-21 Transcript - 1st Sunday in Advent - Pastor Bart Coleman

Grace and peace to you from the one who was, who is, and who is to come.

A bit of a change of venue for me today in that our online congregation will be able to hear better, we hope and you will too, as Bob is working on our sound system.

Today's Gospel probably feels like an alarm that goes off after you had a long and fitful and sleepless night. Aren't we awake enough already? As Christmas approaches, feeling the stress yet, getting things ready. Maybe you're hearing about world events and these two are jarring. We heard this week about interrupted supply chains, the Omicron variant of the Covid virus; we've heard reports of gun violence. We pray along with others, for the people of Abbotsford British Columbia and now in Newfoundland as storms over take those areas. And as flooding happens and landslides keep going and people are displaced. How much more of a wake up do we want or need?

Over the years people have talked about what they really would like in church. A place that is a refuge from all of the mess that's out there. It's as if they say to us particularly us preachers would you just tell us, "there, there, it's okay, go back to sleep". That would be nice and it is true that the Church offers respite but in ways maybe that are different than you expect. And so to invite you to nod off spiritually might be a disservice and I think we would sleep through the gospel, because the good in the great news is no matter what, God is with us, whatever conditions.

This is a season where we are called on to watch. But that is an acquired sort of skill set isn't it. Gardeners know how to watch,

signs that things either need to be pruned back or nurtured or soil needs to be amended or that growth is just right around the corner. Skilled clinicians can watch us and tell us if there are things we need to be concerned about or give us words of hope that our health is improving. We learn to watch. Maybe in your history you bought a new vehicle and you thought you were buying the only one and then all the sudden you see all kinds of the same make and model as you just bought on the road. We're learning to watch. As people of faith we learn watch. Our impulse might be to duck and cover yet Jesus tells us to lift up our heads. And as we hear from Luke's gospel today, all of these things, but by the time Luke got pen to paper they had happened. Jerusalem had fallen, the temple was destroyed and even the seemingly indestructible empire was beginning to show signs of wear and tear and tatter. These are bewildering things and yet Jesus says, "lift up your heads and watch. Watch God at work." And so we too we learn to watch God at work.

You might have heard the news report on Friday that the Prime Minister went to Abbotsford to survey damage and bring words of comfort. In that show of leadership, we are reminded of how important it is that somebody knows what we are going through and that they care. Theologians, the real professional ones who maybe are more even season than I, are quick to connect the dots between such a state visit and the way God shows up in the world.

And this is where we find our hope that God doesn't show up as a tourist, but God shows up in the world fully invested, and God shows up fully connected to our experiences. To borrow a line from another gospel, John's gospel, the very essence of God the word of God becomes flesh and shows up in our neighbourhood and lives among us, full of grace and full of truth. And so we watch and we learn. We learn to be honest. We look with open eyes and what goes on in our world. We know the signs we see them and we offer prayer and we offer

support. We learned vulnerability, which in this world is a difficult lesson to learn, but by the very fact that we gather we say that we are dependent on something other than ourselves. We say things like we are captive to sin and can't free ourselves and we look to God to do the liberating.

So we're honest, we are vulnerable and we are interdependent. The truth about us is that we need each other and the good news is we have each other and we have God. And that makes us a people of hope and a people who are watchful. Even as this klaxon sounding alarm of today's gospel is read, it's important for us to make, it's an odd move, its two directions at the same time. It's moving forward in the church year in anticipation of Christmas, but it's moving backward in the reading of Luke's gospel. As we watch remember the words of the angels to the Shepherds and put them beside the words we read this morning. The angel says, "We bring to you good news of great joy for ALL people. Unto you this day is born, in the city of David, a saviour".

The message that we as hopeful people embrace is that Jesus has indeed arrived in three different ways as the teachers tell us. In the history of Jesus' birth, in the mystery of the confounding ways that Jesus shows up in our midst even now, and finally in majesty. That final day that you heard read about today in one of the first lessons. But in all of these things, as God shows up, it's good news, that God loves us - that God is with us. And, so as we watch, maybe even fitfully in a season like Advent, we remember the promise of the word and the name Emmanuel. God is with us. Amen