



Being Awake

Mark 13: 32-37, 1 Thessalonians 5:1-8, 11

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May the words of my mouth, the meditations of our hearts, and the actions of our lives, be acceptable in your sight O God, our strength and our redeemer. Amen.

Oh the Christian church is so behind the times. The church is just so late into the game. This is the first Sunday of Advent, the Sunday in which we formally begin our four week period of preparation leading up to the Christmas celebrations. But we are just so late. Sears has been ready since September. Do you remember the week in early September when the Wish book used to arrive? Well I don't know about the Wish Book anymore but the TV and internet versions have been hammering away at Christmas preparation for a couple of months now. Ironic that the Christian church should be the last into this preparation game; I suppose it all depends on what you are preparing for.

Now when you are preparing for a big dinner, well the preparation consists of inviting people, planning menus, getting the house ready, preparing the food, preparing the table....

When you are preparing for a concert, the task is different. Instead of making things once that will be gone when the event is over, you practice and rehearse. You go over the music again and again until you get it just the way you want it. You build skill and ability much like a racer preparing for a big race. But, in contrast to a meal, what you prepare is not gone after the event. It is still there, at least for a while.

So what about Christmas? The nature of our preparing depends a lot on what we think we are preparing for. Sears and Chapters and all their competitors would have us believe that we are preparing for a moment when all kinds of yearnings will be finally fulfilled by gifts under the tree. That moment, on Christmas morning, is the critical moment and so you prepare for that moment by buying as much as you can, or even perhaps a little more than you can.

I guess that is part of why the Christian church is so late into the game. At the heart of our Advent preparation is a completely different set of assumptions around what it is we are preparing for.

I heard about a church in which one of their Advent activities, their preparation activities was to pass around a stethoscope so that each person could listen to the heartbeat of an unborn child still inside it's mother's womb. In the same way that the sacred gift of the Christ child comes to us through what was inside Mary, so the real event we are preparing for happens inside each one of us, at the heart of the human being and the heart of the human condition. We are waiting and preparing and rehearsing for a spiritual birth that can come, as Mark puts it, at any time. We are waiting and preparing and rehearsing for the realization of a dream of human community in which, as Isaiah puts it, we will beat our swords into ploughshares and our spears into pruning hooks, and nations will no longer take up arms against nations. We are preparing for God's life and God's vision to be born in us and between us. We are preparing for a birth

inside ourselves, inside our relationships, inside our world- the spiritual bearing of God. This birth can come at any time, and yet in this season of Advent we try to give it special attention. And the question is, how do you prepare for the bearing of God in your life?

Well, I guess you got my first point and that is that the Wish Book or its 2011 equivalent isn't much help in this kind of preparation. In fact it, and much of the rest of the frenetic commercial activity of the season is often an unhelpful diversion away from the real spiritual task of the season.

I believe that the world is filled with God. "The earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof." The world is filled with divine light, divine energy, divine presence. Every moment is filled with God's potential energy. The transformation we long for in our hearts, in our homes, in the world is not far off. In fact it is already here in potential form, and God is just waiting for us to live into it, to wake up to it, and embrace it.

Have you ever been in a situation in which there is a stumbling block between you and someone else. And perhaps this is a person you have had a close relationship with and you miss the way it used to be and you value them, but there is this one thing that has made the relationship difficult. And so you kind of avoid it, and so do they, and it just sits there. And life goes on, and time moves on. But time is precious and then, somewhere along the line, somebody finally says something, and that breaks the ice, and it's all over, and you think, why did we wait so long. All the conditions for reconciliation were there the whole time. All that was needed was for somebody to break the ice- to live into it.

I believe that the same is true for so much of what we long for. God's great potential is here just waiting for someone wake up to it- to live into it- just waiting for someone to be so presumptuous, so audacious as to expect the very best to fall into place.

Well this Advent, I invite you to be so audacious- to prepare for the birth of Christ by living as if ... as if the very thing you hope for in your heart, the very thing you long for in your relationships, you yearn for in the world will actually unfold. You see, I believe that one of the reasons our dreams don't unfold as readily as we might hope is that we don't actually expect them to and so we hold back. But to prepare for God's life to unfold in us, we must create a sense of expectation. We must live as if that is what God wants too.

During Advent we are called to prepare for the birth of Christ today. And we do this by forming our lives around what God would dream for us and for this world. Mahatma Gandhi once said, "Be the change you wish to see in the world." Wake up to the change you long for. Prepare for it with your life. Amen