

Wake Up Call

Presented by Pastor Scott Walters on 12-02-18
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The first time I stayed in overnight lodging by myself was when I attended Jurisdictional Conference in Sioux Falls, South Dakota in 1976. Before I left home, my dad, who traveled every week, suggested that I schedule a wake-up call with the front desk.

And since I didn't want to miss anything at the conference the next day, I called the front desk to arrange for a wake-u call.

"Yes, your wake-up call will be at 6:30 a.m.," said the helpful person at the front desk, adding, "And when would you like your second wake-up call?"

A second wake-up call? Hey, I come from hard-working Wisconsin, I was embarrassed to need even one wake-up call. "I won't need a second call, thanks. One should do it."

The next morning the telephone rang. "Good morning, Mr. Walters. This is your 6:30 wake-up call."

And then the chipper voice added, "And I will be calling you right back in fifteen minutes with your second wake-up call."

"Oh, that won't be necessary," I said. "I'm already awake."

"Are you sure?" asked the friendly voice on the other end. "A lot of people fall back to sleep."

Dear friends, I would like to suggest to you that God is not limited to two wake-up calls. It seems to me that God is more generous and more forgiving than that.

Today, we hear Jesus use some strong language. "There will be signs in the sun, the moon, and the stars, and on the earth distress among nations confused by the roaring of the sea and the waves. People will faint from fear and foreboding of what is coming upon the world, for the powers of the heavens will be shaken."

Welcome to Advent; the season of apocalypse and repentance; the season of preparation and decision. We may have hung the greens last Sunday and we may be getting ready for the birth of baby Jesus in Bethlehem, but today we hear from a grown-up Jesus who's not thinking about shopping, or crèches, or babies.

And so we come to Advent, which seems somehow more precious than ever. Sometimes I wonder if the church doesn't do a good job of reminding us of this aspect of the season – the repentance and the preparation – and yes, the apocalypse.

Whatever the reason, the season of Advent seems more precious every year. Advent invites us to look **back into time**, all the way back to the time before Jesus, back to the time of his humble birth, and back in our own time; back in memory to the previous Christmases we have experienced in our own lives; the family traditions, the customs preserved year after year, the favorite recipes, the worn tree ornaments, and the star Duct-taped together.

At the same time, Advent also invites us to look **forward** to the ongoing process of redemption and salvation; to look forward to God's continuing activity in our lives.

Advent is about God – a God who came into human history in Jesus Christ and a God who promises to continue coming into your history and mine, with wake-up calls that we never planned on and never asked for.

GOD CONTINUES TO OFFER WAKE-UP CALLS.

The problem is that sometimes religion itself gives God a bad name.

Wake Up Call

It is not at all unusual for otherwise thoughtful, mature adults to relegate God and their faith to the intellectual wastelands because of a bad experience they may have had as a child.

Like the little girl from a Tennessee Baptist Church, who used to get up and walk down the aisle out of the church as soon as the pastor was done preaching.

“Why is it that you get up and leave after the sermon, Sally?” She said that when she was just ten or eleven, after the pastor finished the sermon, they sang a few hymns, and then the pastor came down and took hold of my hand. ‘Little girl,’ he said, ‘do you want to go to hell?’ He scared me to death, and so I leave before all that starts.”

The fundamental characteristic of God is not, as so many seem to want to think, a righteous anger, or an exclusive love that creates a religion “for me and thee” and condemns the rest of humankind to hell; but rather, “steadfast love and mercy.”

And in the history of religious ideas, that is new and revolutionary: a God whose love is most like the selfless love of a mother for her child, which is exactly what the ancient Hebrew word for mercy means. Advent invites us to listen carefully to voices such as Isaiah’s; “As a mother comforts her child, so I will comfort you, says the Lord.”

Or the Psalmist: “As a father has compassion for his children, so the Lord has compassion.”

Advent invites us to be watchful and alert for that God: the God who is our creator and judge, yes, but supremely our redeemer; the God who loves us with an everlasting love from which nothing, not even death itself, will ultimately separate us.

Advent comes quietly to invite us – all of us: lifelong believers, skeptics, seekers, the curious, and unbelievers – invites all of us to ponder for a moment a most incredible idea: namely that a humble birth in Bethlehem of Judea is the Advent of God, the coming of God into our lives; that behind all the religious rituals human beings have devised to placate any angry God, there is this – a child in a manger. That behind all the theologizing, there is this – a newborn and a mother’s and a father’s awe and love and gratitude.

It is my firm conviction that people do not come to church to be seen or to meet “the right people.” (Decades back, maybe that was true). It’s not tradition or worn and faded habit.

No, I believe a person comes to church to look for God. And the word today is that God came among us in that birth, that life lived so selflessly, that life that was not, in fact, snuffed out by death.

The word today is that this is what God is like. This is who God is – that vulnerable child, whose cradle is a feed trough.

Advent is an invitation to trust that God: to give your heart to that God, to trust your future to the God who promises to be with you and to come into your life with healing and hope and peace.