

King of Glory Lutheran Church
“Sleeping, One Eye Open”
Year B, Advent 1: Mark 13:24-37
Pastor Ruth Ann Loughry

In Advent we watch in a new way for the Son of Man to come. Destruction that comes will bring new life and a new creation. We wait with hope like sleeping with one eye open. We work for Jesus while we wait for His return. He promises to come!

I have this particularly vivid memory of one Christmas Eve when my parents allowed my brother, my sister and me to all sleep in the same room. I thought it was terrific! I am the youngest of my siblings and they encouraged me to listen for Santa’s sleigh bells and the reindeer hooves on the rooftop. Now that I think about it Mom and Dad were probably doing some last minute preparations. But in that dark room, my eyes were wide open!

Oh how I tried to stay awake! Oh how I wanted to! I was so excited for Christmas morning. I do remember lying there with eyes wide open and ears wide open. Listening. Hoping. Watching the curtains for any shadow of a sleigh in the moon’s light.

Now if I had been a dolphin or a crocodile, penguin, mallard duck, black bird or beluga whale, I wouldn’t have had any problem! Do you know what all these animals have in common? They sleep with one eye open. No joke! They sleep with one eye open and it is called unihemispheric sleep. One half of their brains fall asleep, the other half stays awake to monitor breathing and watch for predators. (<http://blog.therainforestsite.com/cs-one-eye/>)

Wouldn’t that be helpful for we humans?! You could’ve gotten some sleep while waiting up until 1 am when your teenager came home. Or watched a whole series of James Bond 007 movies while actually sleeping. How fabulous would that be!

“Darling, you’ll stop and get milk tomorrow right?” “Yes honey, I heard you.” (Snoring sound) She double checks, just to be sure.
“I bought that dress that cost too much.” “Ok, it looks lovely.” (Snoring again.)

Jesus warned the disciples about falling asleep. He told them that His return would be a shocker. No one would know the day or time. But in Mark’s Gospel, we don’t hear language about Jesus’ return and the end of time that’s scary or horrific. Mark paints a different picture.

Brief history – now don’t snooze on me. It’s 70 AD – seventy years after Jesus’ death. The Jerusalem temple has been destroyed by the Romans and Rome was persecuting Jews in revolt. For Jews and early Christians, the Temple was the center of their faith; symbolically and literally. Without it, everything seemed hopeless. For them it might have felt like the end of the world as they knew it. Grieving and disoriented, they weren’t certain how to move ahead. These would have been some of the first readers of the Gospel of Mark. And Mark had a message for them, written from the lips of Jesus.

“Following those hard times, ‘sun fade out, moon cloud over, stars fall out of the sky, cosmic powers tremble.’ And then they’ll see the Son of Man enter in grand style, his arrival filling the sky – no one

will miss it! He'll dispatch the angels; they will pull in the chosen from the four winds, from pole to pole." (The Message Translation. Eugene Peterson. NavPress. 2002. Pg 124-125)

Though not knowing the day, believers expected Jesus to return in their lifetimes. So this was a message of hope. The Son of Man, the righteous judge, and Savior will come again! Rejoice! His words won't pass away – this is a promise! Stay awake and watch for Him!

Have you been following the story of the Rohingya? If you haven't, here are the bare details.

The Rohingya are an impoverished Muslim ethnic group whose existence has been denied by the Myanmar government. The Myanmar military has been accused of ethnic cleansing of the Rohingya forcing 620,000 to flee to Bangladesh since August. (<http://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-41566561>) It is quickly becoming the world's fastest growing refugee crisis.

On Friday while on his Asia trip, Pope Francis said this. "The presence of God is also called Rohingya." That's it!

With that one sentence, Pope Francis, embodied the message we hear in Mark chapter 13. You are God's image. God is with you, here in your displacement, your tragedy, your disorientation when your former home is gone and people have been persecuting you with ethnic cleansing.

If we were Rohingya, to hear the most powerful Catholic priest in the world, name us as the visible presence of God on earth...what hope that would bring! What validation that our people, our group is not outcast by God. Former popes might not have said these words. But advocacy to refugees and outreach to Muslims have been themes of Pope Francis' pontificate. (<http://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-42193813> video)

The people reading Mark's Gospel would have heard something similar. When the sky is falling and all seems lost, the Son of Man, the judge and Savior, will come and gather you back together. Don't despair, you that are persecuted. Don't lose hope. Live with one eye open to watch and wait.

One eye open. Watching for God. Naming God. God already here.

"The promise of Advent is that God is always at work in the world, bringing new beginnings and a new creation to people and powers long bent on destruction. Yet, because we live in the generation that exists between the "already" of Christ's resurrection and the "not yet" of God's full restoration of the creation we cannot know when that final day will arrive. Instead of becoming preoccupied with the end times, we are to live our lives in a state of preparedness—trusting that our home is God's home and that God is coming once again to dwell with us."

(members.sundaysandseasons.com/Home/TextsAndResources#resources)

We live between the 'already' and the 'not yet.' Yet we live in faith and hope that Christ will return again to be with us. We trust our home is God's home. We will not be forgotten. During this time we are to be awake and prepared, working for the suffering on Jesus' behalf. That's the work of Advent.

So what does this prepared, engaged watching look like? We're not dolphin or crocodile, penguin, mallard duck, black bird or beluga whale. This one eye shut, one eye open thing doesn't come naturally to us. But it can!

The prophet Isaiah says this. "From ages past no one has heard, no ear has perceived, no eye has seen any God besides you, who works for those who wait for him." (Is 64:4)

The great theologian Yogi Berra once said, "You can learn a lot from watching." What are we watching for? New life. New creation. There was shock this week as more influential people were fired or accused. Stars falling? Well, sort of!

But from that fallout, what new life will come forth? Where will God be at work for the healing of industry, systems and people's individual lives? In this already, but not yet time, Jesus tells us to pray. Pray for the victims. Pray for the perpetrators. Pray for those who administrate organizations that "safe work environments" won't just be an empty phrase. Don't shut both eyes and pretend the fallout isn't happening. Watch. Wait.

Read and learn. Pay attention to what happens with the Rohingya. Follow their story. The good Lord only knows what will come of their displacement. Be educated. Long with them for Christ's second coming. Feel their pain. Hope with them for a new life. Watch. Wait.

Here's another way of keeping one eye open – get off auto pilot. ELCA Bishop Eaton was driving to work one day, thinking about everything she needed to do: meetings, emails, travel preparations and what to get on the way home from the grocery store. Suddenly she realized she was in the parking lot at work and she didn't remember any of the nine miles she had just driven. Her mind was on auto-pilot. She hadn't noticed one thing! Perhaps she was practicing unihemispheric sleep!

Bishop Eaton writes this: "Here we are in Advent. This season doesn't exist in secular culture, where everything is barreling toward Christmas. No time to wait, no time to notice, no time to be present. Not this. Not now. All of a sudden we will find ourselves on the day after Christmas not knowing how we got there." She asked her spiritual director about it and the advice given was to meditate on four words. "Just this. Just now." (<https://www.livinglutheran.org/2017/12/disengage-the-autopilot/>)

That's what Jesus is telling us. Keep awake. Watch. Wait. See just this. Just now.

Advent begs us to slow down, not hurry up. Mark the time with advent candles at home. Have devotions. Keep one eye open and let the other one fall asleep. See with the eyes of faith, that in the midst of chaos, lies, uncertainty, and even persecution, this is still God's home and Jesus will return. Everything may fall apart, but the promise of hope remains. Jesus will come again!

Let's learn from the animals with unihemispheric sleep. Watch. Wait. Just this. Just now. God bless our Advent with your presence. Amen.