

Stretching Toward Sunday

Thoughts, readings and reflections based on this week's lectionary readings

December 1, 2013
First Sunday of Advent

The readings this week:

◦ Isaiah 2:1-5 ◦ Psalm 122 ◦

Romans 13:11-14 ◦ Matthew 24:36-44

[Click here to read this week's Scriptures](#)

Keep Awake! Be Ready

Reflections on Matthew 24:36-44

If the beginning of a new church year invites fresh perspectives on physical or spiritual life rhythms, then how will we be challenged by negative impressions of the same-old, same-old of our world in which nothing seems to change?

This text call us to "be awake" (v.42) not just for what is to come, but to continuous preparedness for what is already taking place in our midst. The danger is that we will be lulled to sleep in the seeming sameness or disappointing news of the world around us. When this happens, our failure is in not knowing the significance of this day-that each day is lived in the promise of God's nearness. The Son of Man is coming and you must be ready.

"Watching" is a dramatic way of speaking about God-connectedness. It is not very edifying if it is reduced to an exhortation not to misbehave in case you get 'caught with your pants down', as they say, when Jesus comes. It is about developing an awareness of what the God of the future is saying and doing in the present, to take a God perspective on the issues of the day and the future and to let that happen at all levels of our reality, from our personal lives to our international community, including our co-reality in creation. It is a stance nourished by the Eucharistic vision of hope. It is taking the Eucharistic table into the community, into the present, and letting it watch us and keep us awake to what is happening.

While we often wonder how we can keep Christmas centered on Christ amid all the commercialization, we perhaps need to stress even more the need to keep one's daily life centered on Christ (or the divine presence or substance) amid all the other demands placed on us by work, family, and self.

[Tuesday Bible Study Questions, Suquamish United Church of Christ](#)

Advent

by Frederick Buechner

The house lights go off and the footlights come on. Even the chattiest stop chattering as they wait in darkness for the curtain to rise. In the orchestra pit, the violin bows are poised. The conductor has raised his baton.

In the silence of a midwinter dusk there is far off in the deeps of it somewhere a sound so faint that for all you can tell it may be only the sound of the silence itself. You hold your breath to listen.

You walk up the steps to the front door. The empty windows at either side of it tell you nothing, or almost nothing. For a second you catch a whiff in the air of some fragrance that reminds you of a place you've never been and a time you have no words for. You are aware of the beating of your heart.

The extraordinary thing that is about to happen is matched only by the extraordinary moment just before it happens. Advent is the name of that moment. The Salvation Army Santa Claus clangs his bell. The sidewalks are so crowded you can hardly move. Exhaust fumes are the chief fragrance in the air, and everybody is as bundled up against any sense of what all the fuss is really about as they are bundled up against the windchill factor.

But if you concentrate just for an instant, far off in the deeps of you somewhere you can feel the beating of your heart. For all its madness and lostness, not to mention your own, you can hear the world itself holding its breath.

"Advent" originally appeared in [Whistling in the Dark](#) and later in [Beyond Words](#).



Painting: "Busy Street Scene Winter Snow," Gordon Bruce

Reflecting on the Word



1st Reading: Isaiah 2:1-5

What defines the people of God? What should we “look” like to this world? In this end time vision, what does the city of God look like? What will God do? What will His people do? What will the other nations do? Does our church today look anything like this picture? In what ways does it or doesn’t it?

Psalm Reading: Psalm 122

God invites you to see yourself as a child of God. What obstacles might keep you from seeing yourself in this way? In what area(s) of your life do you need to quit trying to be super human? How might it help you personally to “know that the LORD is God,” that you are a creature and a sheep of His pasture.

3rd Reading: Romans 13:11-14

Worship at Mount Zion was both a regular obligation (although a joyous event) and a bonding experience for temple-bound worshipers. What is "going to church" like for you? Psalm 122 also evokes memories of how Jesus revered and wept over Jerusalem. By comparison, what tears have you shed over your beloved city? "Peace within *your* walls" and "security within *your* citadels" will also benefit believers. How do you go about working for the good of the city where you live and worship?

Praying Toward Sunday

Unexpected God,
your advent alarms us.
Wake us from drowsy worship,
from the sleep that neglects love,
and the sedative of misdirected frenzy.
Awaken us now to your coming,
and bend our angers into your peace.
Amen.

*From the Revised Common Lectionary,
a service of the Vanderbilt Divinity
Library*



Visio Divina: Seeing the Word

Visio Divina invites us to see at a more contemplative pace. It invites us to *see* all there is to see, exploring the entirety of the image. It invites us to see deeply, beyond first and second impressions, below initial ideas, judgments, or understandings. It invites us to be seen, addressed, surprised, and transformed by God who is never limited or tied to any image, but speaks through them.

Know God, Know Peace *Psalm 122*

In a world filled with so many distractions, and demands on our time, one of the hardest things to find is peace. Just saying the word makes me smile, and for many of us it’s something we long for, rather than have.

Our brains are wired to constantly take in, and respond to, what is happening in the world that surrounds us. It takes discipline to slow down our thought process to a state where we can feel at peace.

For the Christ Follower finding peace means seeking the Lord. To make the time to spend quiet moments alone with your God. During these times the Lord will calm you and give you his rest. I read about a bumper sticker that says, “No God, No Peace. Know God, Know Peace!”

Perhaps the kindest thing we can say to a neighbor is “May peace be with you.”

What do you think is your Peace/Stress reading?

I think most of us would settle for 50/50. The last few years I was working, 70+ hours a week, experiencing the joy of commuter traffic, mine was probably 80% Stress and 20% Peace. Now that I am retired from work it’s closer to 80/20 in the other direction.

I selected Psalm 122 to focus on because I read it was about peace. I can easily see why. Verse 7 – “May there be peace within your walls and security within your citadels.” Verse 8 – “For the sake of my brothers and friends, I will say, “Peace be within you.”

I hope spending some time reading Psalm 122 will help bring you peace.

From *The World Through My Eyes*

4th Reading: Matthew 24:36-44

Why did Matthew’s community need to be reminded to remain alert and to “love in expectation”? The lesson is about expecting. What are your expectations as you prepare for Christmas? What have your expectations been in the past? Have they been met? (Perhaps you feel being disappointed. Perhaps you don’t *want* to expect too much.) One can not stay awake all night, every night. How ought one be ready? What does it mean to get ready? What might this directive mean for today?