



GOD'S EMINENT IMMINENCE

Keep awake, therefore, for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming.

Matthew 24:36-44

(Jesus said) "But about that day and hour no one knows, neither the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. For as the days of Noah were, so will be the coming of the Son of Man. For as in the days before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day Noah entered the ark, and they knew nothing until the flood came and swept them all away, so, too, will be the coming of the Son of Man. Then two will be in the field; one will be taken, and one will be left. Two women will be grinding meal together; one will be taken, and one will be left. Keep awake, therefore, for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming. But understand this: if the owner of the house had known in what part of the night the thief was coming, he would have stayed awake and would not have let his house be broken into. Therefore you also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect."

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Welcome: Imago Dei

Welcome to Calvary Presbyterian Church, a Matthew 25 congregation. By that we mean that we identify as a "love your neighbor" church. We are not a "fear the world" church.¹ In Matthew 25, Jesus teaches us that what we do for our neighbors, we do for God. Some translations read that what we do to our neighbors, we do to God. In short, you will never encounter a human being that does not bear the irrevocable image of God. And that includes you. This morning, we will be reading from Matthew 24, where Jesus preaches on the ways empire exploits the people. He says, "after the suffering of those days, the sun will be darkened...the stars will fall..." Do you hear the Good News in that? No? Then, picture this.

The End is Near

High noon. May 19, 1780. Smoke from nearby wildfires combined with the morning's fog. All over New England, the sun disappeared. From Portland, Maine to the southernmost tip of New Jersey, ☞ "darkness had covered the earth and gross darkness the people."² Wildlife got confused and returned to their roosts and burrows. The people, of course, did what people do: they blamed it on Jesus. *He's back! He's back, and we're not ready.* Holy hysteria set in. (Fifth grade theology that still reigns supreme.) But in Connecticut, a judge named Abraham Davenport (1715-1789) had a different take, a theology so true, his words have endured the test of time—from the poem "Abraham Davenport" by John Greenleaf Whittier (1807-1892):

*As if the shadows of eclipse were thrown
Upon the earth. The sky was purple-black,
And overhead, extinguished, seemed the sun.
A weight of wonder hushed the little winds,
And birds did cease to sing. Across the fields
The cattle lowed, and trembled; and the men
Who tilled the land did leave their unhoed rows.
And heaven and earth did seem to meet in gloom.
Fearing the Judgment-Day had come, the House
Of Deputies sat, awe-stricken, and undid
Themselves with thoughts of terror. Some did call
For adjournment. Then rose up Abraham Davenport.
Calm and unmoved, he spoke: "I am against
Adjournment. The Day of Judgment is either
Approaching, or it is not. If it is not,*

¹ David French, "Were You Raised in a Church...?" New York Times, April 20, 2025, accessed online at <https://www.nytimes.com/2025/04/20/opinion/easter-christianity-jesus-trump.html> (November 15, 2025)

² Isaiah 60:2, Handel's *Messiah* <<https://youtu.be/MOIkmlQ2Jw?si=Wc8KCYqA9YvKyXP1>>

*There is no cause for an adjournment. If
It is, I choose to be found doing my duty.
I wish, therefore, that candles be brought in.”
Then, as they were ordered, straightway the men
Brought them, and lighted them, and carried on
The people’s business.*

On this first Sunday of the season of darkness, let’s confess that we live in dark days—a shooting at Valley Fair Mall, a shooting of members of the National Guard, a president adding to the climate of political violence by targeting Afghan refugees with no rational justification, once again blaming brown-skinned people for the world’s problems while willfully ignoring gun violence. Rather than turn on one another—and *it is tempting*—how about we follow the example of Abraham Davenport, and do our duty, light a candle, and live as God’s light for the world.

Sermon: Keep Awake

“Keep awake, for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming.” Sounds ominous. As if God were a thief in the night—ready to surprise us with a pop test, a snap judgment. But this isn’t a passage about fear at all. It’s about awareness. About staying present. About being fully alive to how God shows up in this world.

*Advent: Imminent, Eminent, Immanent*³

I know from experience—and many committee meetings—that Presbyterians love parsing words, so here goes: imminent, eminent and immanent. 1) *Imminent* means something that is about out to happen. It’s soon and very soon. It’s close. It’s almost here. Example: *Christmas is imminent*. 2) *Eminent* means something exalted, lifted up, outstanding. *Marci preached an eminent sermon last Sunday, and today it’s some guy named Victor*. But there is yet another word—“immanent”—spelled differently but pronounced the same, and not in my title today. 3) *Immanent* means inherent, an essential characteristic. Used to describe God, immanent indicates the image of God “present within”. God is part of our original human operating systems. *Divinity is immanent*. Jesus’ words today are about all three. God’s coming is *imminent*—closer than we think. God’s reign is *eminent*—rising above the chaos of our world. And God’s presence is *immanent*—within and among us, in-between every cell, every breath, every body. All three are appropriate and important words to define Advent.⁴

As in the Days of Noah

So when Jesus says, “Keep awake,” he’s not telling us to fear; he’s calling us to notice the oncoming nature of God in present time—God’s Eminent Imminence. Jesus recalls the days of Noah: “They were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage...until the flood came.” It’s like how my Aunt Gretna used to scold her fourth-grade class by saying, “It’s all fun and games...until someone loses an eye!” Both statements are warnings against mindless, reckless behavior. In the days of Noah, the original danger wasn’t the flood—it was reckless indifference. The people chose to ignore what was happening right in front of them.

Happy Anniversary

Tomorrow is our anniversary, you and me. Twelve years ago, Lou and I stood before this congregation, introduced as the Rev. Victor Floyd and his husband Lou Grosso—the first out minister hired at Calvary *with eyes open*. We arrived not knowing what would unfold, but we kept awake to possibility. And although it won’t be recognized by our government, tomorrow is also World Aids Day. I shared my HIV status with you a few years back, and you responded with empathy and a flood of memories of friends and neighbors you still grieve. It’s important for me as a minister to come out again and again. Representation is important, and it’s often exhausting.

Universities are currently being extorted into cancelling their queer students.⁵ And with the elimination of international US AID programs, the current administration let 1.6 million of God’s children die annually of AIDS.⁶ Were I the president responsible for those numbers, I’d try to ignore World Aids Day, too. But this bad news is not the end. Jesus Christ is the alpha and the omega, the beginning and the end. God’s love is on the way. God’s coming is now. And over these twelve years, you have taught this man again and

³ Dictionary discussion. <<https://www.merriam-webster.com/grammar/eminent-imminent-immanent-difference-usage>>

⁴ Advent means “arrival.”

⁵ <<https://www.cbsnews.com/chicago/news/northwestern-university-trump-administration-settlement-antisemitism-investigation/>>

⁶ <

again what it means to keep awake—to hope, to do justice, to watch what God will do through the people.

Nice People

I'm from northwest Georgia. In the South, calling somebody "nice" is about a good a compliment as you can get. *Oh, I don't know them that well, but they sure seem nice. And the way his wife dresses, so nice. Her hair looks so nice, in the front.* But nice is, well, just nice. It's meh. It's fine. It's okay. I love San Francisco, because here "being nice" ain't quite normal. We tend to unveil more than nice. Sometimes we reveal too much, but you know where you stand.

Ugly Things, Like Politics

Writer Naomi Shulman's mother was born in 1934, Munich. She watched her neighbors disappear, and how nobody stood up for them, nobody had enough gumption to do the right thing. Shulman concludes by saying:

Nice people made the best Nazis. My mom grew up next to them. They got along, refused to make waves, looked the other way when things got ugly and focused on happier things than "politics." They were lovely people who turned their heads as their neighbors were dragged away. You know who weren't nice people? Resisters.⁷

Anybody here ever read *Night* by Elie Wiesel? *The Diary of Anne Frank*? Watched *Schindler's List*? Perhaps you wondered how you might react had you been there in 1930s Germany. My friends, we are all answering that question right now, in real time. This world teeters on the brink—political violence, hatred dressed up as religious piety, democracy strained to its limits, wars waged in our names. It's tempting to look away, to scroll past, as in the time of Noah. But Jesus says: Don't sleepwalk through this moment. The flood of suffering around us is a call to awaken, to recognize God's heartbreak over this world's trouble. All of this is on loan from God. How we tend it is a sacred obligation, our duty—as Abraham Davenport put it.

"The Time is Always Right..."⁸

Advent is about waiting—but *only for the sufficient amount of time*. Let the waiting be over whenever God arrives, and the kingdom of God is always arriving, *imminent* in every act of courage, in every gesture of love that refuses the mistake of waiting too long. Now is the time to show up for our neighbors under attack. Now is the time to stand with leaders who dare to go against the emperor. Now is the time speak up for all the cities that losing autonomy, all the universities and teachers who are sold into silence, all of the LGBTQ people who are being intimidated back into the closet. Now is the time when we have to decide. Or will we play nice and let our lives be determined by a very small group of wealthy men who think they're better than the rest of us?

Notice Wonder

Jesus comes to teach us a new way of seeing: how everything is infused with divine presence. And how, through faith, God only increases with time. Keep awake. See the world as the angel told Mary. The poor are filled with good things, the rich are empty, the mighty are dethroned, the lowly realize their worth—an upside down and inside out world is on the way. This kind of awakening reorders everything—family, power, control. Richard Rohr calls the coming of Christ a "betrayal of the prevailing institutions"⁹ for the sake of a deeper vision: the rebirth of Divinity, within and among us.

And friends, that reign doesn't wait for the end days—it erupts in every moment love breaks through fear, when mercy interrupts violence, when a gay pastor stands in a pulpit and says, "This, too, is God's beloved body." Yours is God's beloved body.

Celebration: Hope

Hope says, *I see the unraveling of this world as it is—and I still believe God will win.* Twelve years of grace and challenge, laughter and so many griefs and losses. I've seen in this community what it means to keep awake—to show up at rallies, to deliver casseroles to new parents, to pray with our whole lives. Keep awake—not out of fear, but out of wonder. Keep awake—to the God who comes in your neighbor's need.

⁷ < <https://www.goodreads.com/quotes/8201162-nice-people-made-the-best-nazis-my-mom-grew-up>>

⁸ ... to do the right thing." a quote from Martin Luther King, Jr.

⁹ Center for Action and Contemplation, Richard Rohr, "Leading Us to Somewhere New" November 2, 2025 <

Keep awake—to the Spirit stirring in your own becoming.

Keep awake—to the Christ who is not only eminent and imminent *in all the spellings*—within us, among us, and breaking into the world again and again *through* us. When we live like that—then every moment becomes a special occasion, a feast day. Every table an altar. Every act of courage, every word of love, a sign that the reign of God is with us.

In the name of Jesus, amen.