

Sermon Title: **Hope - Keep Awake**

Bible: **Isaiah 64:3-9 & Mark 13:24-37**

Where & When: at Gilroy UMC on the 1st Sunday of Advent, November 29, 2020

Audience: about 25 YouTube Live-streaming viewers

Opening Prayer

Gracious God, your love and grace is with us. You decided to be with us. You sent your Son, Jesus Christ. In this season of Advent, please guide us to prepare to celebrate the birth of Jesus Christ. In this time, please be with my lips in your love and grace. In Jesus' name. Amen.

1. The Meaning of Advent

Today is the first Sunday of Advent. Advent is a season of four weeks, including four Sundays. The word Advent comes from the Latin, *adventus*, which means "coming." We prepare ourselves to celebrate the comings of Christ, not only the birth of baby Jesus, but also, the presence of God in Word and in Spirit here and now, and the coming again of Jesus Christ in final victory. It is all because of God's first love and prevenient grace. God promises the comings of the Christ. Christ came as a human being, first and already. Christ comes in Word and in Spirit, in order to be with us in this world. Christ will come again. So, we can wait for the comings of the Christ always, and even during this time.

2. Advent Wreath

We still decorate our church buildings for Advent and Christmas, even though we have closed our church buildings. The Advent wreath is one of many. The Advent wreath has evergreen branches, which means a sign of life without end. Its four Advent candles encircle a central

white Christ candle. Four of the candles stand for Hope, Peace, Joy, and Love. Each Sunday, we light these candles, one by one. A pink or rose candle is lit for the third Sunday, while purple candles are for the other Sundays. For the Christmas Eve Service, we light the white Christ candle.

3. Hope in 2020 Advent?

According to the lectionary for the first Sunday of Advent, we read the Gospel of Mark 13:24-37. While we read Isaiah 64:3-9, we light the first Advent candle. It means Hope. Where do you see hope? Where is God in this time? Can you see hope?

We all experience many sufferings this year. We are still in the COVID-19 pandemic. Some of us have lost our loved ones, and we could not even get to see them. We are not allowed to visit our families and friends who are sick. Some of us lost our jobs, and we are barely making ends meet. Some of us needed to see doctors by ourselves. Some of us needed to be evacuated from the danger of wildfire. Some of us are diagnosed with cancers. I believe that you can add more and more.

4. God as Potter and Mystery

The year of 2020 will be finished in a month. This pandemic will end eventually. But we might not be back to our former life. We try many things. I believe that we will try to do our best to cope with this pandemic. But we might need to confess how vulnerable we are, how fragile we are, and how weak we are. We can do many things. But we cannot do everything. We know many things. But we cannot know everything. We are just human beings.

In the reading of Isaiah, we are the clay, and the Lord is our potter. Without the clay, the potter cannot make anything. The clay should let the potter shape itself. By the work of the potter's hands, the clay will be shaped. And the clay needs to be in a hot oven. When fired, the clay becomes hard, and it is ready to use. We should try to do our best. But we do not need to do everything. That's because God will do something that only God can do.

In the reading of Gospel Mark, no one knows the day of the Son of Man's coming. Neither the angels in heaven, nor the Son knows when. Only the Father, God knows. We might want to understand many things. We do not need to know everything. What we need to know is that God will take care of what God can do, according to God's timing. That's because one of God's characteristics is mystery. If we know all of God, then God is not God anymore.

5. Keep Awake!

Even though we had a car accident, I do not need to check out all other drivers' licenses and insurances. I do not need to worry about all the other drivers, even though I want to drive a little more carefully or defensively. I still trust our traffic systems and other drivers.

How about God? Sometimes, God does not answer what we pray. Sometimes, God does what we do not expect. But in these all cases, can we trust God? Can we give some room for God as our potter and the mystery? Can we trust God as God is?

Even during this difficult time, I hope for us to keep awake during this time of Advent. We are not the potter. We are the clay. We are not God. We are God's children. Because God loves us so much, God takes care of what we cannot do and what we cannot think. Let us keep awake to

see God's awesome and mysterious work for us. Let us keep awake, not to forget that we are God's loved ones.

Closing Prayer

Gracious God, thank you so much for being our God. We are your people, and we are your clay. Please mold us and guide us to see your presence, even in this difficult time. In Jesus' name. Amen.