

Sermon Title: **“In Hope: Keep Awake!”**

Bible: **Mark 13:24-37**

When: on the 1st Sunday of Advent, December 3, 2023

Where: about 30 people (plus YouTube streaming viewers) at Gilroy UMC

Opening Prayer

O Lord, let the words of our mouths, and the meditations of our hearts, be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our Rock, and our Redeemer. Amen.

1. Advent: Coming

Today is the first Sunday of Advent! What is Advent? The word “advent” comes from the Latin “adventus,” which means “coming.” Advent is the season of preparing for the coming of Jesus. Jesus is God, but God became a human being of the most vulnerable kind, a baby Jesus. We, Christians, have celebrated God’s humility and emptying of self, or God’s incarnation. God should dwell in heaven or outside of our world, as God is the creator of heaven and earth. Maybe God could share grace and love from heaven. But God decided not to stay only in heaven. God decided to come to this small box of the broken world. That’s because God loves all of you and me. To God, you are more important than anything else, the life in heaven, or even Godself.

During and after COVID-19, we learned many new things. We might meet each other via phone call, text, FaceTime, emails, cards, or Zoom. We could see each other screen-to-screen. But the best way is to meet in-person, right? Then, we can eat together, laugh and cry

together. Sometimes we can hold hands and pray together. Sometimes we can give big hugs to each other. This is the way of real life. What God wants is to live with us. That's why Jesus came. God is with you and God is in you. So, we celebrate the coming of our Lord, Jesus Christ, throughout this season of Advent and Christmas. We are thankful and joyful for Jesus' coming and we are thinking of our loved ones, our families, friends, neighbors, and our community, thanks to God's holy presence.

2. Fear or Hope?

Advent is also the season of preparing for the second coming of Jesus, as we read today's Scripture. When you think of this second coming, what comes to your mind, fear or hope? We do not know when our Jesus is coming again. Are you afraid of Jesus' second coming? Because of fear, do you want to not sleep at all and to keep awake? Is it what God wants us to do, not to sleep, to keep awake, and to be afraid of Jesus' second coming?

Perhaps to the first audience of the Gospel of Mark, Jesus' second coming sounded urgent and like it would happen very soon. It says "When you see these things taking place, you know that he is near, at the very gates. Truly, I tell you, this generation will not pass away until all these things have taken place." They might have thought that they would see Jesus' second coming in their generation. But as you know, Jesus was not coming yet for over two thousand years. Other early Christians also thought that they could witness Jesus' second coming with their own eyes. If we look at Paul's first letter to the Thessalonian church, the early Christians' concern was about those who had passed away before Jesus' second

coming. They were waiting for the second coming in their lives. But some of them died before the second coming. So, they could not help but be sorrowful about the death of their loved ones. That's because at that time there was a belief that there was no hope and no resurrection for those who had passed away. So, Paul wrote a letter to the Thessalonian church. First Thessalonians 4:13-17 says "13 But we do not want you to be uninformed, brothers and sisters, about those who have died, so that you may not grieve as others do who have no hope. 14 For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have died. 15 For this we declare to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will by no means precede those who have died. 16 For the Lord himself, with a cry of command, with the archangel's call and with the sound of God's trumpet, will descend from heaven, and the dead in Christ will rise first. 17 Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up in the clouds together with them to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will be with the Lord forever." The loss of our loved ones is sorrowful, but we know that it is not the end. There is a hope and a resurrection, as we confess that Christ has died and Christ is risen. Jesus' resurrection is our resurrection and our loved one's resurrection.

3. We Are All Children of Light!

Many understandings of the second coming of Jesus have focused on fear or judgement and have taught those ways. But my focus is not death, but resurrection; not fear, but hope; not judgment, but salvation. Death is not the end. The second coming of Jesus is not for God's

anger but for your salvation. That's because you are the children of God. You are the children of light, not of darkness. Our Lord Jesus Christ will come again to save us, because we are all God's loved ones. What God wants is for us to not be afraid of the second coming or of death, but to love yourself and others, as you are loved by our God. God knows that we live in this broken world. God knows that we are not perfect. God knows that our love can fail. That's why God came to us as a baby Jesus, God sent us the Spirit, and God will come again. Please accept yourselves as you are and accept others as they are during this season of Advent. That's how God loves you and others.

4. My Story & Communion

One time as I prepared for a Bible Study, I got a phone call from my wife. She had gotten into a car accident. She needed help. My answer was, "I'm coming." She did not know where she was. My answer was, "I'm coming." I did not have a second car to drive to get to her. My answer was still, "I'm coming." Thankfully, a church member was there and gave me a ride. And thanks to the application of my smartphone feature, "Find My," I knew where she was. When I arrived there, she was busy explaining the car accident and the car damage, and she was worrying about the Bible Study that evening. And my question to her was, "Are you okay?" Fortunately, I knew what to ask, right? Thankfully, she was okay. My only concern was my wife. How to take care of the car accident, car damage, and Bible Study was important to do later, since they were less important than my wife.

When Jesus will come again, I believe that our Lord Jesus Christ's first question is to ask if you are okay, if you know that you are loved ones, if you know that you are the most important. This season might make you feel hectic, and we might be distracted by many things. But please keep awake to remember that you are most important for our Lord Jesus Christ. When we celebrate the coming of our baby Jesus, the stable does not matter. The manger does not matter. The birth of our baby Jesus matters. Likewise, it does not matter even when you are busy. It does not matter even when you are not ready. It does not matter even when you are not the best. But it matters that you are the children of God. Christ came, Christ is coming, and Christ will come again to love you and save you. Just keep awake to know yourself that you are the ones loved by God whenever and wherever you are.

Closing Prayer

O Lord, thank you so much for the coming of our Baby Jesus. Thank you so much for your holy presence in our lives. Thank you so much for your promise of coming again! Thank you so much for your love and grace in our lives all the time! In Jesus' name. Amen.