



CHRIST CHURCH CRANBROOK

You know what time it is, how it is now the moment for you to wake from sleep.

I speak to you as a sinner to sinners, as the beloved of God to God's beloved, as one called to bear witness to those called to bear witness. Amen.

Last night I did a wedding for a lovely couple. They were friends of the parish and they came in from being friends of friends. They came in from New York City and had the wedding here, and there were more people in the choir we hired than there were in the wedding party. It was a lavish affair. And they are so beautiful.

And I got up to preach and I said, "I speak to you as a sinner to sinners, as the beloved of God to God's beloved, as one called to bear witness to those called to bear witness," and as soon as I said sinner, this person right in the front row went, "What?!" And I said, "Well, it's true. You are a sinner. And I'm a sinner. And you are beloved. And I am beloved. And you have been called to bear witness and I have been called to bear witness." That's good news. It's true and it's good news because when we say that, we acknowledge that we are stuck and we need a savior, and that's good news. That's the gospel.

And I say that at the beginning of every sermon, not just for your benefit. It actually, it's for me. It's a way for me to set an intention for myself. A kind of prayer for myself because I want to make sure that whatever comes out of my mouth in a sermon is conditioned by those fundamental facts of our faith. We are all sinners, we are all beloved, and we're all called to bear witness. Advent is a time to set an intention. Advent is the beginning of the church year. Advent is truly New Year's Day for Christians. This is the time in which we make resolutions about the shape of the next year in Christ that we're going to have.

And so the task that you and I have today is to set an intention for Advent. And Advent is a reminder to us that we are stuck in our sins, that we do not have the power within ourselves to find our way to any kind of end which is blessed or happy or fulfilled. Advent is a reminder to us to speak philosophically that there is no end or *telos*, as the Greeks say, to our lives, and that we simply have to try harder and do things differently, maybe up our game or increase our technology, our skills, so we find our way to better fulfillment. Advent is a reminder that we need someone to come from outside. We need salvation. We need God to come and rescue us. And that's why it's the Greek *advent*, to come.

Christians don't believe that this world is going in the direction in which it's going to get better. And this is an argument that is less difficult to make these days. But Christians believe that Jesus will come again just in the same surprising way that Jesus came the first time and surprised us all in a manger in Bethlehem. So Advent is a time to set an intention. Advent is a time for you and me to take some time in our lives and space in our lives to reacquaint ourselves with that basic truth, that we need salvation and we need to be changed from the outside.

And so what is the work of intention that you have before you this Advent? What do you need to know about yourself this Advent? What do you need to surrender? What do you need to give up? What do you need to let go of? This is the work of Advent. And to help focus us this morning, I have chosen one line from the Book of Romans, and I want to unpack it because I think it captures three things that we have to hold onto today, and that comes from the first line, Romans 13 verse 11, "You know what time it is and how it is now the moment for you to wake from sleep." Inside of this, there are three points I want to lift up for you to hold onto.

The first is that word for time that Paul uses. In Greek there are two basic words for time. There is *chronos*, which stands for linear time or sequential time, or the time that you can use to count with a calculator or with a calendar or a clock. There is time in the linear sense, *chronos*, And about this, Jesus says in our gospel today about the time and season when God is coming back, no one knows because we are locked in that chronological order. And there is *kairos*. And *kairos* is a kind of cosmic moment, a kind of fullness of time, a kind of time of transformation and deep change.

And so we read in the gospels, in the fullness of time, God sent Jesus Christ. When Paul says here in Romans, "You know what time it is," he is using the term *kairos*. And when *kairos* is employed, it's not that *kairos* pushes *chronos* out of the picture. It's not that your time that you use to measure your days no longer makes sense, but what happens when *kairos* becomes large in our lives is actually there is a kind of reconciliation of time. The time that we spend in our lives kind of marking the calendar and seemingly always in a rush or numb because of all the blur of activities and demands upon us. That time is changed by a kind of awareness that God is present in this moment.

So the first thing that we have to do to maybe set an intention is to make a decision about our time. How are we going to experience time this Advent? We may not have the control we would like to have over the calendar. Deadlines will loom. We can't avoid them. I can't put off Christmas another week, but I can live into that time differently. Dr. Benjamin Mays, who was the president of Morehouse College and was the eulogist for Martin Luther King Jr., wrote a poem called, "I Only Have Just a Minute."

I only have just a minute,
Only 60 seconds in it.
Forced upon me, can't refuse it.
Didn't seek it, didn't choose it.
But it's up to me
To use it.
I must suffer if I lose it.
Give an account if I abuse it.
Just a tiny little minute, but eternity is in it.

Advent invites us to see that eternity in time in our lives. This past Thanksgiving, one of the greatest blessings to me wasn't so much the time off the clock, although I really enjoyed that, but it was actually the time I had with my eldest child, Phoebe, cooking. Because Phoebe's 25 years old now, and giving and taking advice is one of those things that's a bit of a dance, let's just put it that way. When you get to be a certain age, you're not always impressed by what your father says. And you have to make your own decisions in life. It's your life to lead. But when we cook together, we are perfectly synced. We don't have to even practically speak to one another. We know what we need and there's a moment where one of us leads and the other preps, and then there's a moment where one of us is leading and another of us is prepping, and it's just poetry in motion.

What does that eternity found in a minute look like in your lives? This is what you have to focus on this advent. Don't lose the time. Don't abuse the time. Don't lose these minutes and don't merely make them about your family. Make them about God because God has created and redeemed every time through Jesus Christ because God wants to know and live with you.

The second thing I want you to see in this incredible line from Romans is that word "wake." It doesn't mean simply being alert. It's not merely being woke to injustice in this world. The word for "wake" that Paul uses here is *egerthenai*, which is another word for resurrection. In fact, when you look at the Greek New Testament, the only other times in which this word *egerthenai* is used is to describe the resurrection of Jesus. So when Advent encourages us to be watchful, it's not merely saying stay up late. It's not merely saying keep your eyes open. It's not merely saying that, hey, once something is seen, it can't be unseen. It's an invitation to transformation, an invitation to resurrection, and that usually means an acknowledgement that we are lost or that we are dead or that something is dying and we have to let it go.

So this advent, what is God inviting you to be wakeful about? What is God inviting you to die to so that you might experience that resurrection power that comes through Jesus Christ in your life in a fuller way? At the beginning of his

magisterial epic poem, *The Divine Comedy*, Dante Alighieri marked this in this way. He writes:

Midway upon the journey of life
I found myself within a forest dark,
For the straightforward pathway had been lost.

Ah me! how hard a thing it is to say...
So full was I of slumber at the moment
In which I had abandoned the true way.

The entire epic poem, which is one of the greatest pieces of literature in the world, is a kind of resurrection story of someone who in the midway part of their lives, discovers that they are lost and they have to find their way back to God. And they do it by going down into the depths of sin and evil and death in order to find their way to life and reconciliation and Heaven. What does waking look like for you this Advent?

And the final thing I want to lift up is the fact that Paul has, in his own peculiar way, pointed the finger right at us. You know what time it is, how now is the moment to wake up. You know that moment. And this is a way of making us aware that Advent is not just a time in which we all remember that we are waiting for God, but rather that God is waiting for us. You know the time. You know what it means to wake up. Now it's time to put it into practice. And because I would never ask you to do something that I wasn't already willing to do myself, I share with you a poem that I wrote about the God Who Waits, and this is a bit of a confession of my story, but also a kind of testimony, a witness to my search for God.

When I made you into something I could hold in my hands,
You refused to be held
Slipping my grasp, you held me with your mercy

When I tried to earn your acceptance
You left me with silence
Ignoring my ambition, you asked only for my heart

When I walked the labyrinth of my desires,
You led me in circles
Waiting for my restlessness to end in surrender

When I filled myself with knowledge,
You covered yourself in mystery
Waiting to fill my emptiness with your love

When I ran into the darkness,
Your light shined on my back
Waiting for me to show you my face

When I sacrificed my life on countless altars,
You refused my offering,
Waiting until I had nothing left to give but myself

You are a God who waits
So that lost, I might find you
Exhausted, I might rest in you
Empty, I might be filled with you
Broken, I might learn compassion
Reconciled, I might be made new

You know what time it is, how now is the moment for you to wake from sleep.

Amen.