

Let us pray... Holy God, may we wait with hope, and know your promises are true... Amen...

In 2017 my parents, my sister, my aunt, and I decided to road trip down to southern Illinois during the squelching heat of the August sun.

We had some interesting twists and turns along the way, but we eventually made it to our campground near Carbondale, Illinois... And when we arrived it was hot... Like 110 degrees hot...

Of course, we were tent camping... And the campground we were staying at had what looked like a lake, but we were unable to swim in it because it was a filled in mine, and no swimming was allowed anywhere.

It was a private campground with very kind owners, but the campground was so packed, they could not keep their store stocked, especially with the most desired items, such as water and ice.

So here we are, about 600 miles from home... Scorching heat, no place to go cool down, no ice, limited resources, and a packed campground with very little tree coverage...

Why you may ask? We were there to watch the solar eclipse.

And I remember hoping before we left, and the entire way to the campground, that there would be no rain, or cloud coverage during the eclipse, so we could experience it fully.

And then once we arrived, I hoped even more, because, well we made it there, we had endured the heat, and not much sleep.

For me, I didn't sleep well because even at night the heat seemed relentless...

And I also didn't sleep well because of the excitement and the anticipation for the upcoming solar eclipse.

And for those of you who haven't seen a solar eclipse, you might have experienced this kind of excitement, anticipation, hope, and lack of sleep for other things in your life...

Maybe your wedding day, or when you were a kid waiting for Christmas morning, the birth of your child, graduation, or fill in the blank...

As this is the kind of excitement, anticipation, mixed with worry, fear, wonder, and hope, that our gospel is getting at today...

However, our gospel differs in one important way... We do not know when it will happen. We do not know the day nor the hour, that Christ will return. And so, we are commanded to keep awake!

And I don't know about you... But, if I had to live in this state of anticipation, excitement, hope, and no sleep every day... I would not be able to function very well...

But, I don't this is the life God wants us to have... To burn the candle on both ends, never sleeping, always on edge...

So, what does it mean to keep awake? Well in our gospel parable we are told that, "It is like a man going on a journey, when he leaves home and puts his slaves in charge, each with his work, and commands the doorkeeper to be on the watch."

Did you catch that? Only the doorkeeper is on watch... The doorkeeper being not one specific person, but a key position that can be filled by different people at different times.

Which means, that not everyone needs to keep vigil, keep watch, or keep awake every hour of every day...

Because that is simply impossible and unsustainable.

Instead, we are to come together as a community, divide up the labor, and encourage one another, because one person can't do everything.

Which is why we have different ministries to be involved in. Ministries you can be a part of by filling out your time and talent sheet, by coming to worship, fellowship, and supporting St. John through generosity, so we can be a sustainable congregation as we journey together.

A journey that apparently ends with some crazy apocalyptic imagery.

And though I have never seen the stars fall from the sky, I did see the sun become darkened.

Not because of the coming of Christ, but because of the solar eclipse... And what an experience it was.

The entire campground came together right before the eclipse... You could feel the energy and the excitement that was in the air... People were playing drums, people were singing, the birds were flying around and chirping about, and it seemed like all creation was stirring around in some crazed bewilderment...

But once the eclipse was full... Everything was quiet, still, and breathtakingly beautiful, it was like the world had been frozen in iridescent twilight.....

Then after a few short minutes it was done.

And what made this experience so special, was because of the people we were with. It simply wouldn't have been the same to experience this alone.

Which is true about so many important moments in our lives...

Which is why God created us to be in relationship...

Which is why we are called to love our neighbors. To bear witness. To pray, support, and help one another.

And though these things sound beautiful, and are easy to say out loud, it is in actual doing of the things that matter... When the dirt hits the road...

Which means that in order to do them, you need to be involved, and be willing to hear different opinions, thoughts, and ideas.

Which sometimes may be uncomfortable, like arriving at a campground in 110-degree heat uncomfortable...

But if you don't stay and endure, you will miss what you came for in the first place.

As it is in the doing that we build community... And it is in the staying that we stay awake, not alone, but together.

And this isn't just for Advent... This is meant to be a sustainable model as we live life together in Christ.

Where we don't glorify burnout, but we respect the humanity of all people. By giving grace and sharing the load. Offering help and accepting help.

Because when we come together, we can do some amazing things... Like raising money from our pie auction for the Wausau School District, praying together, worshipping together, learning from one another, supporting our children's ministry, and cultivating a safe space to breathe, to be, and to hope.

Hope that burns in our first Advent candle.

Hope burning for the birth of Christ, the return of Christ, and that Christ is with us now.

Which is a lot of hope, and almost seems contradictory.

But that is why Advent is such a unique season; Advent is the start of it all... Knowing that death will be no more, because God will die.... Is something radical to anticipate during Advent.

But that is what we do each year... We hope for Christ to be born, even knowing that Christ will die, so that Christ can come again.

So very strange, and yet so very hopeful.

Which may be why our gospel was so strange and apocalyptic.

To remind us that the end times are not really the end, but are actually the beginning.

Because when everything seems bleak, and when hope seems lost...

God breaks in and does a new thing. Life springs from death, and hope becomes a birthed reality...

And it is my prayer for all to experience this hope... To share it... To see it... To be it... Together may we journey to the unknown hour, while leaning on each other, to endure the twists and turns along the way. Together, may we anticipate what is to come and share in the excitement, beauty, and wonder God is revealing in our midst... Amen.