

“I was glad when they said to me,
“Let us go to the house of the Lord.” AMEN!

What a beautiful call to worship!

“I was glad when they said to me,
let us go to the house of the Lord.”

St. Stephen, are you glad to be here?
(Ask those from livestream.)

We sing our psalms each Sunday
because that was what
they were written for. To sing...

On this first Sunday of Advent,
we sing to God about Jesus' return.

We see our lives as lives shaped
by the Second Coming of Christ.

And, as we begin the new church year today,
we recall this conviction to be one of
the towering marks of our walk on earth.

Not only that we live after we die
because of Jesus, (we will!) but
that we live right now in a state of

preparation and readiness.

Both glad to be here and ready for
what God brings next. (Pause)

Remember being a child around the first of December?

For children, Christmas is
a distant future, even in December, but

for adults - Christmas is right around
the corner by September.

For kids, Christmas is as far away as
the other side of the world, but for grown-ups,
it's just over the fence. (Pause)

I remember as a child I'd mark off the days on
the calendar to lead up to Christmas.

When I couldn't take the waiting any longer
I'd search for clues or sneak a peek at what
the parents might have purchased for me. :-)

It was obvious I didn't think deeply about
that dubious errand because even if I'd
found out what they'd bought,
I couldn't play with it or put it on and
wear it that day.

It just meant I knew what I was getting!

I still had to wait.

It's a lot like we encounter as Jesus followers.

We know what we're getting but still have to wait.
(Pause)

I find these teachings in life to be ones
that help shape us into human beings
who learn watch and wait.

Let's first take a look at watching.

Perhaps, never before has such a text
been more timely.

Churches that teach people to stay awake,
or to be attentive, are shrinking faster
than snowballs in a furnace, in our culture.

But in parts of Asia and Africa, the church is thriving.

The Holy Spirit runs through communities
in those regions like lightning,

yet violence in those places denies

the peace of Christ and suppression of
the Christian faith is real.

In the different contexts, the call remains the same.

Stay awake!

Keep your eyes open, ears perked,
hearts on fire, and minds sharply on Christ
and the hope of Jesus' coming.

In all contexts, followers of Jesus keep working,
watching, and living under the reign of God
and in the light of God's grace.

But staying awake is tricky, Jesus warns.

And this is when we address the waiting.

Even Jesus spoke of not knowing the exact day,
and waiting makes us tired.

The longer the wait the more likely it is we fall asleep.
Which can be literally falling asleep or
figuratively falling asleep. (Pause)

"It will be like Noah's flood," Jesus said.

People will be feasting, partying, sleeping around,

and making plans without paying
a bit of attention to Noah.

That crazy man building a boat in
the desert under a cloudless sky.

Then in a flash the deluge is upon them all.
Those unaware and not alert will be swept away.

(Pause)

There are wadis all over the world.

Wadis are valleys that slice through dry land.

A wadi is dry and empty most of the year.

They entice people for hikes and picnics,
but come a sudden rain, and in no time,
a wadi becomes a lethal, raging death trap.

“One spring, long ago, an English family visiting Tunisia
did just what a wadi invites you to do:
they had a picnic.

Mom, dad, and their two children didn't know
about the danger and there they were eating
and drinking when out of sight,

a storm began and in a flash the torrent
was upon them, crashing down through
the wadi without any warning.

‘The flood came and swept them all away.’” (24:39)

The tragedy can be a lesson to teach about
not living life on auto-pilot.

When we go through the motions of getting by.

We oft find out later, there wasn't a bit of joy
in that life and it might even be setting us up
for tragedy. (Pause)

This, beloved, is why Advent season is
so important for us.

We may not know when Jesus comes again,
but we do know something.

We know that the day is coming.

This we know.

Jesus' people know the day is coming.

And as Christ's people we know what
the endgame is - grace and truth at

the end of all things.

“Be ready,” Jesus says.

Live a life that is ready and watching for Jesus’ face.

Hoping, working, watching, and praying
for the whole world to see Jesus’ hands and feet.

For in that grace, “your life may be a sign for others...
like a little Noah building his ark.”

AMEN!

We welcome today Kirsten Ebbesen to the mic for a
stewardship testimony.