

THOSE
WHO *keep awake*
DREAM
1st Sunday in Advent

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November 29th, 2020

Twin Towers United Methodist Church

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**Worship words - including the call to worship, centering prayer, pastoral prayer, and Advent candle-lighting liturgy have been adapted from resources written by Sarah Are | A Sanctified Art LLC | sanctifiedart.org.*

WORSHIP GUIDE

Before you begin your time of worship, find a comfortable place to be and gather whatever you might need: your Bible, your Advent candles, something to write on and with, your computer/connected device (if you intend to listen to music online), etc. Feel free to adapt this worship guide in any way that makes best sense to you and those you might be gathered with. (Consider inviting someone – a friend, a family member – to worship with you.) Commit to spending the next hour with God.

PRELUDE - Listen and sing along to a song or hymn that blesses and centers your spirit!

WELCOME –

The power of dreams lies in waking up.

For when we close our eyes, **We can see a better world.**

When we close our eyes, **We can dream a better dream.**

But when we open our eyes, **We begin the work of faith.**

The power of worship is the same.

When we enter this space, **We can see a better world.**

When we enter this space, **We dream a better dream.**

But when we leave this space, **We begin the work of faith.**

So come in. Dream your dream. **Find hope here.**

For in an hour, **We will begin the work of faith.**

Let it be so.

CENTERING HYMN - “Come, Let Us Dream” W&S 3157

Listen here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ku-N7dhpp18>

1. Come, let us dream God’s dream again.
Come, one and all, let us ascend
the mountain top where those of old
saw God’s new day on earth unfold.
2. The lame shall walk, the blind shall see,
the doors swing wide, all prisoners free,
the lowly raised, the proud brought low.
This is God’s dream: let justice flow.

CENTERING PRAYER – *You are invited to take a deep breath as you pray:*

O Great Dreamer,

You dreamed up the stars in the sky.

You dreamed up that magic baby smell and the way cream sinks into coffee.

You dreamed up the crunch of fall leaves and jazz music.

You dreamed up wisteria and evergreen and the pure magic that is a six-foot-tall sunflower.

And in the midst of all of that, you dreamed up a dream for your people—

a dream of hope and justice,

a dream for eyes wide open, to both the world's suffering and the world's beauty.

So today, as we worship, we ask that you would plant that same dream in us.

Pour out your Spirit on our hearts and minds so that we may see what you see,

and dream what you dream. Gratefully we pray. Amen.

SCRIPTURE - Isaiah 64:1-9 & Mark 13:24-37 / NRSV

Isaiah 64:1-9 ¹ O that you would tear open the heavens and come down,

so that the mountains would quake at your presence—

² as when fire kindles brushwood

and the fire causes water to boil—

to make your name known to your adversaries,

so that the nations might tremble at your presence!

³ When you did awesome deeds that we did not expect,

you came down, the mountains quaked at your presence.

⁴ From ages past no one has heard,

no ear has perceived,

no eye has seen any God besides you,

who works for those who wait for him.

⁵ You meet those who gladly do right,

those who remember you in your ways.

But you were angry, and we sinned;

because you hid yourself we transgressed.

⁶ We have all become like one who is unclean,

and all our righteous deeds are like a filthy cloth.

We all fade like a leaf,

and our iniquities, like the wind, take us away.

⁷ There is no one who calls on your name,
or attempts to take hold of you;
for you have hidden your face from us,
and have delivered us into the hand of our iniquity.

⁸ Yet, O Lord, you are our Father;
we are the clay, and you are our potter;
we are all the work of your hand.

⁹ Do not be exceedingly angry, O Lord,
and do not remember iniquity forever.
Now consider, we are all your people.

Mark 13:24-37 ²⁴ “But in those days, after that suffering,
the sun will be darkened,
and the moon will not give its light,
²⁵ and the stars will be falling from heaven,
and the powers in the heavens will be shaken.

²⁶ Then they will see ‘the Son of Man coming in clouds’ with great power and glory. ²⁷ Then he
will send out the angels, and gather his elect from the four winds, from the ends of the earth to
the ends of heaven.

²⁸ “From the fig tree learn its lesson: as soon as its branch becomes tender and puts forth its
leaves, you know that summer is near. ²⁹ So also, when you see these things taking place, you
know that he is near, at the very gates. ³⁰ Truly I tell you, this generation will not pass away until
all these things have taken place. ³¹ Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not
pass away.

³² “But about that day or hour no one knows, neither the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only
the Father. ³³ Beware, keep alert; for you do not know when the time will come. ³⁴ 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. ³⁵ Therefore, keep awake—for you do not
know when the master of the house will come, in the evening, or at midnight, or at cockcrow, or
at dawn, ³⁶ or else he may find you asleep when he comes suddenly. ³⁷ And what I say to you I
say to all: Keep awake.”

This is the Word of God for the people of God. **Thanks be to God!**

LISTEN - A friend posted an article recently from National Public Radio from early October.
It’s headline read, “Overlooked: Asian American Jobless Rate Surges But Few Take Notice”.

The story chronicles the toll of the pandemic on Asian American workers, a community that went from having the lowest unemployment rate in the country (2.8%) to “one of the highest” in a matter of months (15% in May and 10.5% in August). While I appreciated the content of the article, their unpacking of the unique factors that are impacting the Asian American community through this challenging season, what has stuck with me all week is the title: “Overlooked...Few Take Notice”. Those words have stuck with me not because I’m offended that my community, the Asian American community, has somehow been overlooked or ignored, but because I’m troubled and concerned that there is so much happening around me all the time that *I* have overlooked, that *I* have failed to take note of...and, in doing so, missed something of God. Do you ever have that feeling?

The truth is that we live in a crazy distracted world! An office worker, on average, supposedly checks their email inbox 30 times in an hour (that’s every other minute!). The average cell phone user supposedly picks up their phone 1,500 times each week (every 12 minutes!), spending about 3 hours and 16 minutes every day simply checking their phone. We almost never read more than 20% of whatever webpage we’ve just clicked on, moving on within 10-20 seconds! In 2015, our attention spans had reportedly shrunk to 8.25 seconds, shorter than a goldfish’s at 9 seconds! All of this is held within the context of our hyper-connected, hyper-on, hyper-linked up world where information is coming at us all the time. How do we even know where to look, what to take note of, where to focus in on?

It is into all of this that we hear Jesus telling his disciples, “Keep awake!” He says this not once, but 3 times. (“Beware, keep alert...Therefore, keep awake...And what I say to you I say to all: Keep awake.”) On this first Sunday of Advent, as we open ourselves once again to anticipate the coming of Christ and the fruition of God’s dream, we might wonder: what is it that we are supposed to keep awake to? What is Jesus wanting us to stay alert for, to be aware of, to bring our attention and focus to? Is it possible, we’ve fallen asleep, that we have overlooked or failed to notice that which Jesus calls us to? And how exactly do we “keep awake” given all that clamors for and claims our attention?

If you’re anything like me, our text today from Mark might have made you say, “huh?!” This doesn’t sound like the Jesus we know, telling us stories about the here and now using everyday objects, or offering sharp directions for transformative living. In fact, this text sounds a little apocalyptic. And it is! At the beginning of our chapter, Jesus prophecies that the temple, a

huge and sturdy building made of heavy stones that they have just walked out of, will be “thrown down” and destroyed. A few of his disciples naturally want to know more, asking, “Tell us, when will this be, and what will be the sign that all these things are about to be accomplished?” What follows is a sermon known as the “Little Apocalypse” in which Jesus, instead of answering the when and what of the end times, calls his disciples to beware, alert, and awake a total of six times! That’s a lot! We might take to heart that Jesus is communicating something important here. Our reading (verses 24 - 37) is the last section of this sermon.

Most scholars think that Mark’s gospel was written during the very chaotic, violent, and uncertain period known as the Jewish-Roman War in which, in fact, the Second Temple was destroyed. These were years full of revolts and riots in which different segments of Jewish society rose up against Rome’s oppressive and harsh rule. To many, those years must have felt like the end of the world - a time when indeed there was suffering, the sun was darkened, the moon would not give its light, and the stars were literally falling from heaven. Historians tell us that the impact of these years was dramatic, that the Jewish people went from “a major population in the Eastern Mediterranean into a scattered and persecuted minority.” These were years that surely brought home Isaiah’s plea for God to “tear open the heavens and come down”.

It is into this difficult reality that Mark has Jesus calling the disciples to “keep awake”, to stay alert, watchful and present to the signs of God’s presence and coming. What does that mean to us today?

Dr. Marcia Riggs of Columbia Theological Seminary writes, “We are being reminded that to be the people of God requires an ethical posture of attentiveness, to “keep awake” (v. 37). The text charges us to ‘keep awake’ because we do not know the day or the hour when the fullness of ‘God with us’ will be realized. To keep awake means we are being charged, in the vernacular of BLM, to be ‘woke.’ Being woke means being aware of, enraged by, and willing to protest in solidarity with people who are pushed to the margins of society because of systemic oppression manifested as racism, sexism, heterosexism, ableism, homophobia, transphobia, xenophobia—any and all forms of objectification and dehumanization we enact upon one another.” Dr. Riggs’ words remind that God is always found at the margins and in the most vulnerable, and that keeping awake to God’s presence and coming is a call to keep our eyes and heart focused on the people and places that are, even now, experiencing harm and injustice. For

we trust and believe that it is there that God is present, there that God is at work, there that God is birthing hope and healing. This is something that I do not want to overlook nor fail to take notice of.

So where might you keep your eyes and hearts focused this Advent? Where is God calling you to stay alert? For me, I'm committing to "keep awake" to Palestine, a place and a people that I have long held close to my heart. In 1998, I arrived in the Gaza Strip through the United Methodist Church knowing far too little about the region and the conflict. I had no idea that I was about to spend the next 15 months in what people then and people still call the largest open air prison in the world, for the almost 2 million residents - the majority of whom are refugees - have no freedom of movement while almost every aspect of their lives is controlled by the Israeli government. During those 15 months, I came to know and see a very different story and reality from the one we are too often told here, one in which Palestinians are terrorists and Israeli's are victims. This is a disturbing twisting of the truth. I will commit to "keeping awake" by checking in on friends that I've made in the village of Wadi Foquin, a small village just 5 miles southwest of Bethelhem. Ata just sent these pictures to me 2 weeks ago - they are of the waste and sludge that the illegal Israeli settlement of Betar Ilit, perched on the ridge above Wadi Foquin, regularly dumps onto the village's farmland, compromising not only their food source but also their water sources. I will commit to "keeping awake" by following the news coming from the region, and by continuing to participate in the work of Friends of Wadi Foquin, an effort begun by our sister church Buena Vista to support community development efforts in the village. This will be my Advent practice of "keeping awake" for I don't want to be found asleep or distracted when the master returns.

Friends, how about you? How might you practice "keeping awake" this Advent? Where might you keep your eyes trained and your heart open to? I want to invite you to pray about that and then would you send me a note sharing how the Spirit leads? I would be delighted. In the meantime, it is my prayer that by keeping awake, we might - like Mary - find God's dream planted and growing in us through this season. Amen.

CANDLE LIGHTING LITURGY

I dream of sunflower fields.

I dream of flying someplace warm.

I dream of the days when we could hug friends.

I dream of a kinder world.
I dream of empty beds in jail cells.
I dream of a world that will let kids be kids.
I dream of full tables instead of empty bellies.
I dream of schools with enough money to teach.
I dream of parents with enough money to feed.
I dream to keep awake, because if we don't dream of better days, then we might forget that this is not what God imagined.
So today we light the candle of hope, for hope is the very thing that keeps dreams afloat.
Please light your first Advent candle, the candle of hope.
May this light be an invitation to keep awake.
May this light be our invitation to be Advent people—people who dream. Amen.

PRAYERS of the PEOPLE – *Spend time in prayer. What did you hear for yourself through today's scripture and reflection? Talk to God about it. Then lift up the joys and concerns that are in your heart. You might write them down, speak them aloud, or pray them in silence.*

I would be honored to pray with you and for you.

Please send a note via text, mail, or email or give me a call if I can do so.

SHARING OUR GIFTS— *How might you offer yourself and all that you have to God this week? How are you being invited to practice generosity? Spend a moment listening for God's direction.*

You are invited to contribute financially towards the purpose and ministry of TTUMC. We are a congregation committed to being conduits of God's healing in our neighborhood and beyond, and in so doing, impact the last and the least. You can contribute by mailing in a check, dropping off cash, or giving online via PayPal (visit www.twintowersumc.org). Take a moment and do that now. Please also be sure to return your Stewardship Response Card via mail or online [here today!](#)

CLOSING HYMN - "Come, Thou Long-Expected Jesus" UMH 196,
Listen here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vRAFQCOKjgE>

1. Come, thou long expected Jesus,
born to set thy people free;
from our fears and sins release us,
let us find our rest in thee.
Israel's strength and consolation,
hope of all the earth thou art;
dear desire of every nation,
joy of every longing heart.

2. Born thy people to deliver,
born a child and yet a King,
born to reign in us forever,
Now thy gracious kingdom bring.
By thine own eternal spirit
rule in all our hearts alone;
by thine all sufficient merit,
raise us to thy glorious throne.

BENEDICTION -

Friends, as we enter this new week, let us keep awake!

Awake to God's dream.

Awake to God coming.

Awake to God already here in and amongst us.

As we do so, may we share hope with all whom we meet.

...by noticing someone else's humanity.

...by listening to someone's story.

...by praying for our world. Amen.

NOW GO AND PASS CHRIST'S PEACE!

SCRIPTURE for Dec. 6th, 2020: **Mark 1:1-8 & Isaiah 40:1-11**

PRAYER INVITES:

- For Fred's grandsons as one recovers from skull surgery and the other from cardiac arrest. For Fred's close friends as one partner declines from MS.
- For Joyce's upcoming surgery on Dec. 10th.