

Mark 13:37 (NRSV) **What I say to you I say to all: Keep awake.**¹

“Keep awake? Lord, do you know what time we woke up on Black Friday after we were out all night on Thanksgiving? Some of us didn’t sleep at all! We can’t keep awake! Lord, we’re tired!”

Lines blurred between Thanksgiving and Black Friday even more than usual this year and that blurring is worthy of observation. It instructs us as we enter Advent, the season of prayer and preparation for Christmas. To begin that preparation, I suggest we pay attention to our language: “Christmas” is a combination of “Christ” and “mass;” it is the feast celebrating the incarnation of the Son of God, so at least once per day, instead of saying “Christmas,” say, “Christ mass” as a way of reminding yourself of what this is all about. Prepare yourself for the coming of Christ by reminding yourself that Christ is coming and have a Merry Christ-mass.

Blurring the line between Thanksgiving and Black Friday is the latest tactic in the powers-that-be’s desperate attempts to make us mindless who mind-less. “Pay no attention to what is going on around you! Ignore the needs of your neighbor who lost his job. Don’t notice what we are doing and are not doing and are preventing from getting done! There’s a sale!”

It’s the classic tactic used by illusionists from time immemorial; keep the audience distracted; focus their attention here while you do what you want to do over there, and voila! It’s magic!

No, it’s distraction. It’s us not keeping alert. So while we’re wandering about the shops and Malls this Advent, listen to the music. Does the song mention our Savior, or does it fail to mention the reason for the season? Why are we buying these gifts and preparing this feast anyway? “Keep awake.”

A word of caution: As we consider how the lines are blurring, be careful that we do not blur the line between the Church and the world, between the faithful and the faithless. It’s very easy to slip under the covers of bromides like, “Keep Christ in Christmas,” and “Jesus is the reason for the season!”

All of which is true, but what is false is our expectation that the faithless will keep our festival our way. Putting that false expectation to rest is the key to keeping awake. Once we stop expecting society to be Christian we can start expecting ourselves to be Christian. We tell the story. We sing of our Savior. We shake off secular lullabies and keep awake.

¹ *The Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version*. 1989. Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers.
Isaiah 64:1-9

Psalm 80:1-7, 17-19

Mark 13:24-37

We keep awake to Advent hope. These are dark times. The powers that be aren't what they used to be, and we're all struggling to adjust to this new world where faith is on the outside looking in. It's new to us, but not new to God. Mark 13:24-26 (NRSV) **“But in those days, after that suffering, the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will be falling from heaven, and the powers in the heavens will be shaken. Then they will see ‘the Son of Man coming in clouds’ with great power and glory.”**²

On the surface, this kind of language puzzles us, but it's simply the language of hope. It's another way of saying, “It's always darkest just before dawn.” “The sun will come up tomorrow.” “Today is the first day of the rest of your life.”

All clichés and all true; all ways of saying the same truth; the moment that changes everything may be right around the corner. Keep awake. Don't miss it.

Keep awake, and expect the unexpected. Advent invites us to see signs of hope in the worst of times. “The Son of Man is coming.”

Jesus isn't asking us to look at life through rose-colored glasses. He's on his way to the cross. He was born in a stable. Don't let the tinsel and glitter get in the way of the story! God was born as an outcast on the outside of a town on the outside of an empire; God was born on the outside looking in. That's how the Son of Man came; his return will come as just as much of a surprise.

And until that great surprise, he will continue to surprise. He will surprise us with signs of new life; he will surprise us with fig leaves blossoming – opportunities and possibilities that we dared not dream possible. He will surprise us with wake up calls that remind us to expect the unexpected.

Keep awake. Circumstances come. Circumstances go. Lines blur, but the Advent promise remains. Expect the unexpected. The moment that changes everything may be right around the corner. Don't miss it. Mark 13:37 (NRSV) **What I say to you I say to all: Keep awake.”**³ And have a Merry Christ mass. Amen.

² *The Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version*. 1989. Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers.

³ *The Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version*. 1989. Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers.
Isaiah 64:1-9

Psalm 80:1-7, 17-19

Mark 13:24-37