

“Will You Make Room?”

Date: Nov. 27, 2011

Place: Lakewood UMC

Text: mark 13:24-37

Theme: Advent, readiness, preparation

Occasion: Advent 1, Year B

The scripture reading you just heard may have taken you a bit by surprise. You're thinking “Christmas.” You can't help it. We've just survived one of the biggest shopping weekends of the year. The decorations are up. “The lights are brightly shining.” And some of you have even begun to address your Christmas cards.

Then, you come to church today, and we read these very un-Christmas-like words: “But in those days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from the sky and the heavenly bodies will be shaken.”

Jesus was talking about the day of judgement when the Son of Man will return in glory and power. And then Jesus says, “Do not let Him find you sleeping. Stay awake, and **watch!**”

What kind of scripture reading is this, just when we're beginning to feel a lot like Christmas? It's scripture for Advent, that's what it is. But it's been a year since we last celebrated Advent, so let me remind you what Advent means. Advent is the season in our church calendar that includes the four Sundays before Christmas.

The word *advent* means *a coming*. But in truth, it means two comings, because Advent reminds us of Jesus' first coming to Bethlehem over 2,000 years ago. It also reminds us of Jesus' second coming, which we still wait for, when Christ will come in glory and in power.

For both advents, his birth and his second coming, Jesus tells us to stay awake and watch! Advent is the season of preparing our hearts so that there is room for Jesus in our lives. Will you make room in your heart, this year, for Christ to

come in?

Take a look at this short video clip, that reminds us how easy it is to get distracted by other things, and to miss the real reason for this sacred and holy holiday.

(Short video to be shown here: “Forgotten Christmas.”)

When Jesus was born into our world, do you think many people were looking for Him? Probably every loyal Jew in those days believed that *someday* God would send the Messiah. But only a few were really looking. Think about how many people *actually* came to see Jesus at his birth, or soon after?

The shepherds came, but as far as we can tell, they weren’t looking. Instead, an angel came looking for them. One might say they came to the manger purely by grace, just because God sought them out.

The wise men came - and they *were* looking. Their story is one of the miracles of all times, that some men from a pagan background were led to the newborn king. And then there was Simeon and Anna - they were *definitely* looking. The gospel of Luke indicates that they had been waiting for years for the coming of the Messiah.

The greatest event in the history of humanity, and so few people were actually looking for his birth. I sometimes ask myself, “If I had been living when Jesus was born in Bethlehem, would I have been watching, and waiting, and ready?”

I suspect the answer can be found in the earnestness with which I wait for Him now, in our own time. The title of today’s sermon is taken from a choir anthem that I sang a few years ago entitled “Will You Make Room,” by Ruth Elaine Schram. It begins as the choir sings: “This is the season for friends and family, bright decorations and gifts around the tree. With joyous carols, the good news we

proclaim, as we welcome the Messiah, as we bless his holy name.”

But then, after taking note of all the things we usually associate with the holiday, there is a word of caution, and a question. The song goes on to say, “But with all the celebration, and all there is to do, don’t forget the one thing He has asked of you.”

Now think about it. What is the one thing He’s asked of you and me? What does God want us to do with Jesus? Admire Him? Honor Him? Put up statues of his family to honor his birth? Spend a lot of money, buy a lot of presents? Is this what God wants us to do with Jesus?

No. God wants us to make room for Jesus in our hearts.

And so the song goes on to ask: “Will you make room for the Christ-child, a home for Him on earth? Will you make room for the Spirit, as he brings new birth? Will you make room in your life for love’s pure light to shine? Will there be room for the Savior, in your heart and mine?”

That’s the question for this morning: “Will you make room for the Christ-Child to be born?” Some cynic might say, “How do you make room in your heart when it already full of blood and tissue and muscle?” Well, if you ask that question, you’ve already missed the point.

What we’re asking is this: Do you have room for Jesus in your life? Or are you too busy? Are you too busy with other things to listen for God’s voice, to read God’s word, to worship in God’s house? Is there room in your life for Jesus, or is your life too busy and too cluttered, for Him to enter in?

You see, this whole concept of watching and waiting for the return of Christ is not about staying awake non-stop forever. That’s not what Jesus meant. It’s about being spiritually prepared, so that when Jesus does show up, you and I will be ready

to receive Him. What will you do this Advent, to make room for Jesus?

One of the ways to help us make room in your hearts is with our advent devotional. It's available in the lobby on each of the tables. It has daily scripture readings, and a short prayer. Take time to prepare yourself spiritually for Christmas. I hope you'll pick one up and use it, as a family, or take it to work and use it on your break, or use it instead of or in addition to what you're already doing for daily devotions. Reading the sacred scriptures, and spending time with God in prayer is one way to make room for Jesus.

A second way is to be a part of a small group. This Advent the two adult Sunday School classes have combined for an advent study, to talk and to share and to pray together. Even if you've not been a part of either of these classes, come for Advent and join with others who are making room in their hearts.

A third way to make room for Jesus is to think of others. Volunteer to ring the bell for the Salvation Army kettle campaign. Buy a gift card for a family at the Refuge. Give to the Family Outreach fund at Lakewood. Buy some gloves and hats to be given to the homeless. Make a donation to the Horn of Africa crisis fund.

Visit one of our homebound members. Go Christmas caroling at one of the nursing homes. Gift wrap at the mall, to help raise money for the Erie Alliance - December 13, 14, 15 from 9am till 10pm, any hour you can give is appreciated. Find someone who might celebrate the holiday alone, and invite them to share it with you.

Music is another way to prepare yourself for the birth of Christ. We listen to it on the radio, we hear it in the malls. But really take the time to listen to the words of the Christmas carols. Don't be cynical and tell yourself you've heard them all before. Try to hear the words as if for the first time.

You see, at the heart of Christmas is the birth of our Savior. Christmas is first and foremost and always a religious holiday. Let us never forget, that Christmas is the birthday of Jesus, God's beloved Son, sent to save the world from sin. So I ask again, Will there be room for the Savior, in your heart and mine? Will there be room for Jesus? Well, will there be?"