**Green Blades Preaching Roundtable**

First Sunday of Advent

November 27, 2022

Isaiah 2:1-5; Psalm 122, Romans 13:11-14; Matthew 24:36-44

Pastor Greg Kauffman, Eau Claire area, Wisconsin

What does it mean to keep awake?

Welcoming the Savior in the way we treat creation

These reflections were written right on the heels of several devastating hurricanes, and just prior to the November elections in the United States. Our Gospel reading for Advent 1 urges us to “keep awake.” What does that look like, almost 2000 years after the Gospel of Matthew was written? As I meditated on the assigned texts for Advent 1, I used that question to focus my thoughts.

Scholars often note that Matthew’s gospel has organized Jesus’ teachings into 5 distinct blocks of material, with our Advent 1 text as part of the 5th and final teaching block. Using several parables, Jesus urges his followers to “keep awake” and “always be ready” since we don’t know when the Son of Man is coming. In case his original auditors, or current readers, wondered just what “keeping awake” or “always being ready” looks like in real life, Matthew spells it out in chapter 25, which concludes with the famous parable popularly known as “The Sheep and the Goats.” You keep awake and are always ready, by living out your faith serving those that are always on the margins – poor, stranger (read immigrant), hungry, thirsty, sick, imprisoned etc. The more I thought about this list, the more it reminded me of the 8th century prophets, and their critique of Israel and Judah. More on that in a minute.

Based on the almost unanimous consensus of the scientific community, you could add our planet to that list now. To connect it more directly to our Gospel lesson, we also know that the first groups impacted by climate change are those least able to cope with it. How do we serve a planet that has been degraded by centuries of human plundering? What might it look like to serve God by serving the environment?

I mentioned the 8th century prophets above, and Isaiah is one of the four canonical written 8th century prophets. In chapter 1, Isaiah attacks worship (no matter how well done) devoid of justice, and declares that God simply can’t endure it any longer! He calls for the nation to “cease to do evil and learn to do good; seek justice, rescue the oppressed, defend the orphan, plead for the widow.” Isaiah 1:16b-17

For a deeper dive into the prophetic critique of Israel and Judah, and by extension, us, here is a list of passages you will want to explore: Deut. 10:17-19; 1 Sam. 15:22-23; Psalm 146; Prov. 14:31; Prov. 15:8; Prov. 21:3; Isaiah 1:23; 3:13-15; 10:1-2; 58:1-14; Jeremiah 7:1-26; Hosea 6:4-6; 8:11-13; Amos 5:21-25; Micah 6:8; Zech. 7:9-10; 14:21. The “big 5” markers of a nation’s health and faithfulness is how these groups are treated: poor, powerless, widows, orphans and immigrants. I’ve been wondering if today we need to add one more – the planet!

Our text from Isaiah 2 follows, and imagines that “In the days to come” the nations will stream to Jerusalem in order to be taught God’s ways, and that weapons of war will be converted to farming implements. What might God’s ways look like in regard to God’s creation?

The Biblical perspective of the world is that it is God’s and that Jerusalem/Mt. Zion/temple are merely the footstool where God’s presence is most keenly experienced. Psalm 122 urges its auditors to seek the good of Jerusalem for the sake of “my relatives and friends.” What might that look like if we took Psalm 24 seriously, which declares that “the earth is the Lord’s and all that is in it, the world, and those who live in it…”

There is indeed a price to pay for choosing to regard this planet as God’s, and make personal and national changes to slow down or reverse the climate degradation that has happened over the past centuries. But our reading from Romans 13 gives us courage and reasons for making these changes. Paul writes that since salvation is near, believers can risk setting aside our own personal comforts and desires, and put on Jesus Christ!

How do you think Jesus Christ would choose to act in this world? How do you think Jesus Christ would choose to treat this world? How do you think Jesus Christ would respond to the scientific communities’ call to change how we treat this planet?

There is indeed a rich feast offered us this first Sunday in Advent. It is indeed a time to prepare to welcome once again the Savior into our midst. What better way than to treat God’s creation with the same reverence God does!



Pastor Greg Kaufmann served congregations in Colorado and Wisconsin between 1975-2000. Since then he has served as Assistant to the Bishop of the Northwest Synod of Wisconsin. In 1993 he helped begin that synod's Lay School of Ministry, and currently teaches its Bible courses. In 2000 he helped start his synod’s resource center and still serves as its director. He was a member of the ELCA’s Book of Faith leadership team, and currently is part of the ELCA’s Life of Faith Initiative leadership team and the ELCA’s Lay Ministry Programs leadership team. Greg is the Director of the ELCA's Select Learning ministry. Greg has written a number of the quarterly adult Bible studies for Augsburg Fortress, and recently completed a course for Select Learning on the formation of the NT. When not teaching, writing or working, you can find Greg enjoying his three grandchildren, on top of 14,000 foot mountains in Colorado, hybridizing daylilies on his farm, or visiting national parks with his wife, Diane, in their RoadTrek camper named Slinky.