

Mystic Congregational Church, UCC

Mystic, Connecticut

Sermon from December 2, 2007

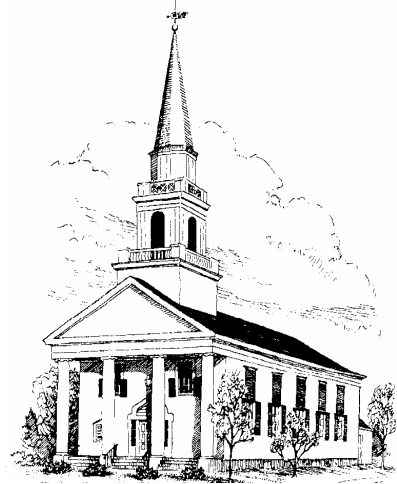
Rev. Barbara J. Libby

“Living in the Light”

Scriptures:

Isaiah 2:1-5

Matthew 24:36-44



Did you ever get a wakeup call that you did not want to get? For my 50th birthday, my daughter, my family and my friends gave me a 10-day tour of Greece. It was an amazing surprise gift and the trip was wonderful! However, in the hotel my daughter and I stayed at in Athens, Greece, we received a wakeup call in the middle of the night. We were already confused enough by the time zone changes and the fatigue of travel. We had gone to sleep utterly exhausted one night when suddenly both the phone rang and the television came on full blast in the middle of the night!

What a shock it was and how confusing to have both telephone ring and the TV come on automatically! As it turned out, the phone call was an automated system, so there was no one to talk to about it immediately. Now that was a wakeup call to remember—a totally startling and unexpected thing, not a wakeup call we had hoped for. Of course some wakeup calls can be a good thing for us even if we don't experience it that way at the time—when we really need to get up on time, when we have a plane flight to make, when we have an important meeting to get to. These wakeup calls can be vital.

Life also deals us other kinds of wakeup calls, right? I imagine each of us has some sort of story about those other sorts of wakeup calls we've received. Perhaps it was a health problem, that twinge in the chest that nudged us to get a checkup to find that we had a blocked artery and needed immediate surgery. Perhaps our wakeup call had to do with one drink too many that pushed us into some incident or accident which turned our life upside down and even turned our life around. Perhaps the wakeup call in your life had to do with a relationship or a career choice or some awareness that your life needed changing.

The church season of advent is a kind of wake up call. Advent is a season intended to prepare us for what is to come and to awaken us once again to all that has already come. Advent is primarily concerned with eschatology—hope and expectation for both the first and the second coming of Christ. Advent invites us to look at the “already” of a God-man, Jesus, who came in human flesh to this earth to live among us. Advent is also about the “not yet” of the consummation of all things in Christ at the end of time. Advent can be experienced then as both a time of threat and promise.

We give thanks for the gift of Christ's coming to us in the past. Yet we also anticipate some strange and unknown time of a second coming, a future promise that is not entirely clear for most of us. During advent then, we try to juggle both the past and the future, as well as to live wide awake in our present when we wait upon the arrival of the Christ child into our hearts in the now.

What helps you prepare for Christmas? What is it that helps make your advent season just right for you? Is it the putting up of the Christmas wreaths or is it the Christmas lights? Is it the decorating of the Christmas tree or the getting out of the Christmas crèche? What kinds of preparations do you do each year that help you prepare for Christmas? What triggers your memories and your remembering the many layers during advent? Is it the baking of cookies, the smell of the greens? Is it the lights in the windows, the lighting of the advent wreath, the songs and the music?

What kind of wakeup call do you need this advent? We have lighted the Candle of Faith for our first Sunday in advent this year. The Candle of Faith reminds us that this season is all about our faith—a faith that Christ not only came to us once, but comes to us and moves among us still, and that even into the future Christ's presence will be known in a new way.

Here in New England, as the days get shorter and shorter and the darkness of the night threatens to overcome us, look for the light. Notice the many different kinds of light we use especially at this season. Notice the lights of the advent wreath and the use of candle light. Live in the light this advent. Look for Christ in this season. Walk in the light of God this advent. Live in the light of Christ. Consider where your hope comes from at this season.

Advent is a time to wait and to watch and to prepare to welcome the Christ child into our hearts once again. Advent is an opportune time to open ourselves for Christ's coming to us in a new way this year. Connect the dots between the traditions of this season and your faith. When you pull out those boxes of ornaments and decorations and lights this year, notice the connection between Jesus as the light of the world and our human need to fend off the darkness of these shortened days. Notice that new light is associated with new life. Note that during advent we celebrate the victory of light over all the darkness the world presents.

In Thornton Wilder's play *Our Town*, a young woman named Emily dies at the early age of 26. She asks the stage manager who narrates the play if she can return for just a brief visit with her family one last time. The stage manager grants her the wish, advising her to choose the least important day in her life which "will be important enough," he says. Emily chooses to return on her 12th birthday, only to find her father obsessed with his business problems and her mother preoccupied with kitchen duties. Emily cries to her mother, "Oh, Mama, just look at me one minute as though you really saw me. Mama ... 14 years have gone by. I'm dead!" Unable to change any of her past or to influence her parents, she breaks down sobbing and cries, "We don't have time to look at one another. Goodbye, world! Goodbye, Mama and Papa.. Oh, earth, you're too wonderful for anybody to realize you! Do any human beings ever realize life while they live it—every, every minute?"

This advent, find time to pay attention! Stay alert! Be aware! Let's live wide awake in

the light of God this advent! On this first Sunday of the church's new year, on this first Sunday of advent, we come to this communion table to share in a sacrament of expectant waiting, a sacramental ritual which binds the past and the present and the future, much as this advent season does. Here at this table, we remember the full story of Christ's life—not only his birth but his adult life and teachings, his death on a cross, and his resurrection to eternal life.

It is here at this table that we are reminded of the many layers of the story and of the hopeful words of our faith. In the simplicity of a loaf of bread and a cup of juice, we are reminded of the story of our faith—story emerging from and rooted in a shoot from the stump of Jesse, a story flowing through time, a story rich with promise and hope.

With one loaf, we are reminded of the dream to be one whole body of Christ. With the breaking of the loaf, we are reminded of a body that was broken for each of us. We are also reminded of our own brokenness, our own disjointedness, and our own separation from God and from one another.

Yet we come to this table in the hope that, through that once broken body, we can become whole. With one cup we are reminded of the eternal cup of blessing which we have each received. We are reminded of the blood that flowed for each of us as the child and the lamb of God was sacrificed for each of us. Here at this table, we are reminded of the costliness of Christ's sacrifice and of the discipleship to which we are each called. Here at this table, we come in the hope that the body and the lifeblood of God's son was not spilled in vain. Here at this table, we are reminded to live wide awake in the light of God! Amen.

