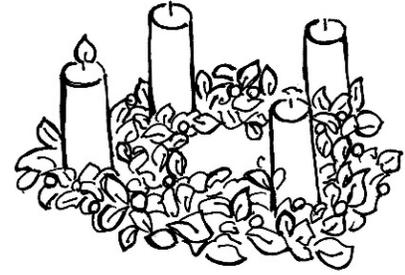


The First Sunday in Advent

December 1, 2019



Matthew 24: 36-44

The Necessity for Watchfulness

36 *“But about that day or hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. 37 As it was in the days of Noah, so it will be at the coming of the Son of Man. 38 For in the days before the flood, people were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, up to the day Noah entered the ark; 39 and they knew nothing about what would happen until the flood came and took them all away. That is how it will be at the coming of the Son of Man. 40 Two men will be in the field; one will be taken and the other left. 41 Two women will be grinding with a hand mill; one will be taken and the other left.*

42 *“Therefore keep watch, because you do not know on what day your Lord will come. 43 But understand this: If the owner of the house had known at what time of night the thief was coming, he would have kept watch and would not have let his house be broken into. 44 So you also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him.”*

A reflection from Paula Cooper, mission co-worker serving in Malawi, Kenya, Rwanda and Zambia

I love this time of the year: the hanging of the greens in our churches; the purple or blue paraments; the Advent wreath, with its three purple or blue candles, the pink candle, and the Christ Candle in the center.

The First Sunday of Advent is the season for opening and preparing our hearts with the anticipation and commemorations for the Second Coming of Jesus, the Christ. This Sunday represents Hope. However, most of us use this time to start preparing our houses or apartments for cleaning, remodeling, or painting tasks. Some of us start to think about pulling out the decorations. Many of us begin to write our lists for presents or the ingredients needed for those favorite recipes! Some of us are so mindful of those preparations that we forget to be watchful for Christ!

Are we more focused on the preparations that won't offer us the Hope, Joy, Love and Peace that is embodied in Jesus, the Christ? Will these activities deepen our relationships with Him? Are our hearts and eyes opened to watching for Christ's coming? In the hustle and bustle, do we forget that His Second Coming could happen NOW? Perhaps, it will happen during one of these Advent Sundays; and then, perhaps not! The scripture clearly states, "But about that day or hour no one knows..." Should we be focusing our energies on preparing our hearts, minds, bodies and souls for His arrival? Christ is in the center of that wreath for a reason. The preparation events for remembering His birthday should be about Jesus, the Christ! Why? Because my sisters and brothers, it's all about the Kingdom of God – everything else will fade or drift away!

Recently, I traveled with a colleague from Lundazi to Lusaka in Zambia. While on the road, he told us that he had to stop in the village to visit his family. They had called him several times while he was driving; they were anticipating his arrival. They were getting excited to see him. They didn't want him to forget to stop by and neither did they want to miss him; they were expecting him. They didn't know the

exact time that he would arrive so their anticipation was growing intensely; hence, the repeated calls. As we turned off the main road on to a dirt path leading into the bush, I could see an older man – his uncle – standing near a hut and gazing down that path. I didn't realize it, but he was actually standing watch. He was standing about 50 meters from his own hut. He was watching and waiting for his family member, my colleague, to arrive. In fact, about 10 of them were standing outside of their home. Watching! Waiting! Anticipating!

When he stopped the vehicle alongside their home, they began laughing, shaking hands, hugging and taking pictures. After all of that, they loaded his trunk (boot) with bags of maize, potatoes, rice, and a squawking chicken! As we drove off, I asked why they would give him all those items. He's a professional, and it was very obvious that they had fewer resources than he. He told me that they want to send the visitor on their way with provisions for the journey. My LORD gifts from the least of things – in this case, given from the little that my colleague's family possessed in order to show him love, care and honor!

When Jesus, the Christ, arrives will we be gazing, looking out for him with expectation and anticipation? Because He is coming back!

By the way, what gift will you have for Him?

Paula

To learn more about Paula's ministry, visit pcusa.org/paula-cooper.