

The theme for this Advent season and the series we will be journeying through is from Sanctified Art, and it is for the dreamers in all of us—those who dream of a deeper connection with God and those who dream of a better world. It's for those who dream of comfort and for those who have given up on their dreams. It's for those whose dreams have been crushed and for those who show us that dreams take time. Join us this Advent as we dream alongside prophets and angels, Mary and the Magi. Join us as we seek and sow God's dreams for our world.<sup>1</sup>

This Advent season begins amid pandemic concerns. 2020 has not been the year to remember. We were not prepared for the dramatic shifts in our ways of living as COVID-19 began its trek across the globe. Many physical bodies have been ravaged and lives taken by this fierce virus. Families, churches, schools, and employees have been scattered from their gathering spaces into physical isolation. Likewise, Black Lives Matter (BLM) protests erupted in cities (nationally and globally) as Black women and men died at the hands of police violence.<sup>2</sup>

To begin Advent amid pandemic and protest is a befitting point of departure for 21st century people of God. We are being reminded that to be the people of God requires an ethical posture of attentiveness, to “keep awake” (v. 37). The text charges us to “keep awake” because we do not know the day or the hour when the fullness of “God with us” will be realized.<sup>3</sup>

Dr. Marcia Riggs writes, “To keep awake means we are being charged, in the vernacular of BLM, to be “woke.” Being woke means being aware of, enraged by, and willing to protest in solidarity with people who are pushed to the margins of society because of

systemic oppression manifested as - any and all forms of objectification and dehumanization we enact upon one another.”<sup>4</sup>

Read Mark 13:24-37

This passage in Mark is sometimes referred to as the “Little Apocalypse.” The Greek meaning of apocalypse is “revelation”—an unfolding or unveiling of things not previously known.

What in our world right now feels like a “Little Apocalypse”? For most of us that is an easy question to answer. Take your pick. What is disruptive, disorienting, and threatening? Again, an easy question to answer. In the midst of this turmoil, what is being revealed to us? That question, however, may be difficult for us to answer easily.

Just as we gear up to celebrate the beginning of the Christian year, we read about the end of history.

We expect the joy of the season and are told to “run for the hills.” We look forward to getting the tree up and buying the presents.

We’re waiting for the Christ child in all its blessed innocence and we get the apocalypse.

We want to relax into the season, and we receive a warning: “**Keep awake** – because the Master of the house is coming and you do **not** want to be asleep!”

Goodness gracious, there is conflict in this text.

It has always been this way. There is conflict in our lives. There is conflict in the world. Always tension between what is and what is to

be – disagreement between our present reality and our future hope or horror – and getting to the hope may not be easy!

The earliest Christians really thought the end time would be in their time. The fall of Jerusalem seemed to foreshadow the coming of the Son of Man on the clouds with great power and glory, sending angels, gathering the elect.

Certainly fundamental to our faith as Christians is this trust that Christ will return, that all things in heaven and on earth will be reconciled to the Divine Will – that indeed the New Jerusalem will be established and God will dwell among people – and death will be no more.

And as the generations and millennia have passed, thoughtful Christians have had to adapt to the extended timeline of expectation. How do we live in the meantime, keeping awake, maintaining the faith?

In this and every season we live and love, worship and serve, act with compassion, generosity, hope, faith, claim the gifts of the spirit and live fully and joyfully – but always with the tension, the anxiety that comes from reading or listening to the news.

There is darkness in our world, this day. There is fear in our world this day. The stars are falling, the powers are shaken.

Covid is still out there. There are still immigration issues. Hunger, homelessness, and poverty are still present. There is a myriad of social injustice issues that continue to plague our nation that have been going on for years and have a continued presence today. Our government is at odds with each other and people on both sides are

in conflict. Police shootings and abuse continue, and we don't know what or who to believe.

Our world as we know it seems to be coming apart at the seams. And yet into this age, you and I must keep awake, and believe that Christ rules, that the kingdom is present anytime there is peace, justice, and humility. Anytime a stranger is welcomed, a prisoner is visited, a drink of water given – Christ comes.

This is not a time to be passive. Christ is still looking for his people – those who look to him as the King of Kings and Lord of Lords. What are the dreams we carry with us into this Advent season? What dreams from this past year have unraveled or been deferred? What new dreams must be nurtured in this season? Questions that have certainly been going through my mind.

The Good News of the Gospel of Jesus Christ is this: into these changeable times God is present, God comes, God calls, God builds, God **is**. And we are asked to keep awake firm in this reality and not give into any other reality.

The reality of the present moment calls for us to dig deep, and hang in there, and keep awake, accept community, and weep with those who weep and laugh with those who laugh, and worship, and keep the faith even when it is really hard to do.

And so we break bread and remember the night when Jesus came to realize what his call was – where his faith in God would lead – that the end of his life was mere hours away, and that at noon, darkness would cover the whole land.

We share the cup – and lift our eyes and rise up and claim the promise that God is coming and God is here. Emmanuel! God has never left! And we are called to be the community, to be the people, to be the person in *this* age when the heavens are rattled, and things look dark.

So let us eat the kingdom feast – because we *know* what is ultimately coming, and so we strengthen ourselves for the living of these last days in the midst of years to come, taking in all the beauty and the joy, standing firm in the midst of all the tensions and strife, living as kingdom people awaiting the coming of the King.

As we lite the Advent candle of hope, we keep awake by dreaming, by envisioning how we will live out God's promise to be with us. We expect God to be with us and meet us on the other side of this pandemic and protest. For the other side of pandemic and protest is not a return to "normal"; it is living the hope of God's continuing revelation of healing, peace, and justice.<sup>5</sup>

Thanks be to God.

1) Dr. Marcia Riggs, Sanctified Art Those Who Dream: for Advent – Epiphany Year B

2) Sanctified Art Those Who Dream: for Advent – Epiphany Year B

3) Sanctified Art Those Who Dream: for Advent – Epiphany Year B

4) Dr. Marcia Riggs, Sanctified Art Those Who Dream: for Advent – Epiphany Year B

5) Dr. Marcia Riggs, Sanctified Art Those Who Dream: for Advent – Epiphany Year B