

With no *ifs, ands, or buts*, this text draws us into the heart of Advent and its recurring emphasis on *being ready* for some future event. *Don't be caught off guard*, we're being told. Something in all our lives lies ahead we will all want to be ready for it. And there's no use trying to figure out when or where or how it will all unfold. *Just be ready!*

There's certainly a lot here in this text we all can relate to. Not a single one of us is too old to remember the angst of a pop quiz in school when you knew you had not done the assigned homework! And we're all in the same boat right now of getting ready for Christmas, maybe wishing *again* that we had started our shopping a long time ago! Who's rushing around looking for a deal on tires that you've put off buying, but now that first snowfall has brought you right to the edge of having to do something? And may I just give a thumbs-up to *all of you who were so ready and well prepared* to celebrate a long-ago ordination, which we'll just refer to here this morning as an example of someone *not being ready* and in that state of being *caught totally off guard!* (Still, many thanks again for a wonderful time together!)

Here in this church, we share a love for the beginning of Advent, excited again as Diana opens the wonder of the Season each Sunday while we munch breakfast treats. Decorating the sanctuary is a "set" tradition for worship on this first Sunday of Advent. Gathering Presents for Panthers and ordering poinsettias and lighting a candle on the Advent Wreath are all part of special things we do as we *get ready*, as we *anticipate the birth of Jesus* and his coming into our world and into our lives. And as we celebrate that event each year, we're called to remember the promise Christ brings, for all life to be set right for all time, and forever address

and heal what is broken and twisted in our world when he comes to establish God's kingdom on earth.

In the Church, *we anticipate* the fulfillment of that promise of what we call the 2nd Coming of Christ. Just as we prepare to celebrate his 1st Coming, his birth, his 1st Advent, so we are called to *be prepared and ready* for his 2nd Coming, his *2nd Advent* into all our lives. And we join the thousands of generations from Old Testament times on, who have hoped through the ages for God to intervene in this world and bring Divine righteous judgment upon us and begin that longed-for time when all humanity will live justly and peaceably together. We who follow Christ, join with all who anticipated and who yet look for God to send a *Messiah*, to redeem humankind!

People have been hoping for this to happen for a *long time!* Even in Jesus' day, remember the eager question posed to him in the Temple: *when will that time be?* We don't know when that time will be. That's one thing we do know—*that we don't know!* Jesus said as much when he told his disciples that only God knew the "day and the hour."

Just like the people of Noah's time, Jesus said, you won't even be aware that anything out of the ordinary is going to happen. Just as it was *business as usual* even in those ancient days before recorded time, *so it will be for you*, Jesus reminded those hanging on his every word.

So it has been for every generation, and so it will be for ours and the next one too. *Business as usual* is the way of our lives that consumes our time and so quickly ages us over the years. Yet the Christ of our lives here today is calling us to *be ready*, as if there is

an agenda to be followed as we attend to the “busy-ness” that is ours to do each day! And there is a “readiness” to attend to, but maybe we could think of it in not so quite a Presbyterian way as having in hand one of our beloved agendas!

We can let go of our plotted agendas and put down our pens and set aside our lists whether written down or digital. And without a single reminder, we can still find our way to *be ready* for that promised time when Christ returns, by living; by doing what we are called to do as his disciples—as we follow him, carrying on with the work he placed in our hands to do.

It’s a bit like that homework assignment, and he gives homework to every follower of his, maybe *homework on steroids* because it’s in our wheelhouse and we’re on deck every single day with Christ at the helm! *Be ready*, Jesus has said down through the ages. Be merciful and forgiving as you go about your lives. Be peacemakers, *live the life of God’s kingdom*. Rise and face injustice and work for change. Respect one another—don’t just “love” them; respect them and treat them with genuine acceptance and dignity. *Show a regard for others as you want others to show you*. Share with those in need. Advocate for those who have no voice. Help heal the broken world you live in.

Later in Matthew’s Gospel Jesus said this to his followers: feed the hungry, welcome the stranger, heal the sick, clothe the naked, extend your friendship to the outsider, the outcast, the exile. [Matt. 25:31+] This is to be our *business as usual*, what we do as we live our ordinary lives, these lives of ours all as ordinary as *working in the field and grinding our meal*; all becoming 2nd nature to us as we seek to live out the call of Christ. This is the way we will be *ready*,

prepared. This is the way to the peace and justice of God's Kingdom we long for in our world.

A blessed Advent Season, dear friends, as we wait to again celebrate God's promise to bring salvation to the world, born as a baby to a virgin named Mary and a man named Joseph. It's a story of the wonder of God's Love every time we return to Bethlehem to re-live all the tradition. A blessed 2nd Advent awakening as well, as we look forward to that day when all life *will be at peace* and *be made whole*, with itself and with its Creator. May we hold on to the Divine Promise, steadied by the hope it brings, and renewed in our minds and hearts to carry on our lives of *business as usual*—this awesome life of following Christ each day. *Amen!*

"blessed business as usual" Matthew 24:36–44 112722 Mkh 1st
Advent