
Should I Stay or Should I Go?

**A sermon by the Rev. Canon George Maxwell
The First Sunday of Advent – Year A**

There's a little bumper sticker that reads, "Jesus is coming — look busy."

It's a joke, of course. But like most good jokes, it tells the truth. It names our suspicion that frantic activity is the same thing as faithfulness. That if we never stop moving, we'll somehow be ready.

And into that atmosphere, Jesus says: "Keep awake."

Not "Keep moving."

Not "Keep proving yourself."

Simply, "Keep awake."

Now, Jesus doesn't give us a code to decipher. He gives us a picture. Two people in a field. One stays. One goes. Two grinding grain. One stays. One goes.

We often hear this as a threat — the righteous lifted away, the rest left behind. But if you listen to the earlier story Jesus refers to, the story of Noah, it was the ones who were swept away by the flood who perished. And the ones who remained were held in God's promise.

So, Jesus is asking a different kind of question. He is not asking whether we will be whisked off to safety. He is asking whether we will remain present in our own lives or be carried off by everything that pulls us away from ourselves.

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Not "Should I stay on earth or ascend to heaven?" But "Should I stay awake to God, or drift into the half-life of distraction?"

And this is where the sociologist Hartmut Rosa helps us. Rosa says we live in a world of persistent acceleration. Everything moves faster — expectations, commitments, demands. And because everything moves faster, we find ourselves always behind, always catching up, always slightly absent from where we are.

The result isn't only exhaustion. Rosa says the deeper danger is alienation. We lose the capacity to let the world reach us. We stop hearing it speak. We move through life untouched, unaddressed.

Against this, Rosa sets what he calls resonance — those moments when something truly connects, summons us, changes us. A word. A friendship. A dignity we didn't expect. A silence that feels alive.

Resonance is not something we manufacture. It is something we receive. And it depends on a posture of wakeful presence, a willingness to be addressed.

That, I believe, is close to what Jesus means by "Keep awake."

He is not calling for nervous vigilance. He is inviting us to inhabit our lives more fully. To be porous enough that God can be heard in the very places we assume are empty.

It's striking that Jesus places this moment of divine arrival not in scenes of drama or spectacle, but in the middle of ordinary labor. A field. A grinding wheel. The offices and kitchens and street corners of our own routines.

He is saying: This is where God comes. This is where your attention matters.

The danger, then, is not wickedness. The danger is sleepwalking — moving through the world without ever allowing it to move us.

Advent stands gently, firmly, against that danger. Advent says that God comes in the small hours, not in the noise.

God comes in the spaces between our tasks, not simply in the tasks themselves. God comes in the unexpected attentiveness of the heart, not in the frantic attempt to appear busy.

To “stay awake” is to seek a kind of inner stillness that allows the world to speak again. It is to trust that God's address is always waiting to be heard, if only we stop long enough to listen.

And if you feel scattered or stretched thin — if your attention is frayed at the edges — then you are one of the people Advent is for. Because Advent is not about celebrating our readiness. It is about God's readiness. God's decision to come to us before we have arranged ourselves suitably.

God does not wait for us to be perfect hosts. God comes into the world we actually inhabit — the hurried one, the heavy one, the unpolished one.

So, when Jesus says, “One will be taken and one will remain,” he is not dividing the world into winners and losers. He is inviting us to remain present when so much conspires to take us elsewhere.

Will you be swept away by the next demand, the next rush, the next fear? Or will you remain awake to the One who stands quietly, insistently, at the center of your life?

For the astonishing claim of Advent is this: the God who is coming is already here. Already at the door. Already speaking. Already offering the grace that makes wakefulness possible.

Grace does not remove us from the world. Grace opens our eyes within it. It teaches us how to hear again. How to resonate with the world God loves.

So, when the world asks, “Should I stay, or should I go?” may our answer be the one Jesus gives: Stay.

Stay awake.

Stay present.

Stay open.

For Christ is coming — quietly, steadily, again and again, into the life you already have.

Amen