



# SERMONS AT SAINT MARK'S

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THE FIRST SUNDAY OF ADVENT, NOVEMBER 30, 2025

ISAIAH 2:1-5; PSALM 122; ROMANS 13:11-14; MATTHEW 24:36-44

## THE GRACE OF ADVENT VIGILANCE

**Matthew 24:36-44** [*Jesus said to the disciples, "But about that day and hour no one knows, neither the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. For as the days of Noah were, so will be the coming of the Son of Man. For as in those days before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day Noah entered the ark, and they knew nothing until the flood came and swept them all away, so too will be the coming of the Son of Man. Then two will be in the field; one will be taken and one will be left. Two women will be grinding meal together; one will be taken and one will be left. Keep awake therefore, for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming. But understand this: if the owner of the house had known in what part of the night the thief was coming, he would have stayed awake and would not have let his house be broken into. Therefore you also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an unexpected hour."*]

As a child, I sometimes jumped when I was excited. While jumping, I'd maybe flap my hands up and down. I was never conscious that I was doing any of this until someone pointed it out while it was happening. I remember being vaguely annoyed but usually unconcerned when worried family members brought this atypical behavior to my attention. Later in life, a neurologist cleared me of any danger related to these "neuro-surges."

As a young adult, I finally figured out that these bird-like dances from childhood were just my body's unique way of expressing the electricity of delight. I jumped because I was happy. I'm told a vestige of this can still be seen as a little extra bounce in my step, sometimes.

My jumping terrified my Grandpa Dyrnes, though. If I started jumping in his presence, he'd say, with a plaintive voice in his Norwegian accent, "Oh, Adam, dear Adam, please don't jump!"

Don't do it, don't do it!" As if he genuinely believed something awful was about to happen to me if I kept up my happy dance. I think his primary concern was that someone might see my private joy at school and harass me for it.

I must have jumped in front of him the most because I was always happy to be in his presence. He was my best friend as a child, and despite his well-meaning if misplaced worries, I always felt safe, loved, and wholly embraced by this special man.

I attribute my grandpa's underlying generosity of spirit, his abundant love, his instinct for living with joy and compassion, and his genuine interest in others as hallmarks of what I'm calling Christian vigilance. Although he sometimes expressed his affection through anxiousness and worry, his bedrock and his hope were in Christ Jesus.

Advent Blessings, Saint Mark's Cathedral!

On this first Sunday of Advent, we are invited to consider what it means to be vigilant in our watching, in our waiting, and in our anticipation of Christ's coming – in history, in our lives today, and at the end of time.

I invite us to consider Christian vigilance in Advent as a gift from God. If you're anything like me, it might help to untangle the stress of meeting impossible expectations from

maintaining proper vigilance as Christians. I'm convinced the ancient Advent theme of vigilance is much better understood as a grace than a burden.

The watchful attentiveness we are called to as followers of Jesus is radically different from anxious fear. In fact, I believe we're called to the Advent watch to stand in pointed opposition to the world's anxiety: its rapid consumerism, its greed, its oppression of the marginalized and vulnerable, its malignant power centers of corrupt leadership, its warmongering, and its often violent and uncaring attitude toward migrants and refugees.

Here's one Advent promise and you can take this to the bank: when Christ comes again, unexpectedly, into this world, the evil powers and principalities running the show will fall subject to God's justice.

In today's gospel, Jesus uses parables and sayings to speak of the coming of the Son of Man to confront the powers and principalities of this world. If Jesus is driving any point home here, it's that no one knows the hour of his returning, not even Jesus himself.

We should not waste our time or our vigilance forecasting the Second Coming. I also don't think any of us are meant to imagine ourselves or our neighbors in either the "left behind" or "snatched away" categories in Jesus' parable. Focusing on winners and

losers in the Realm of God is not about vigilance but anxious insecurity.

Today's scriptures also teach us that true vigilance prioritizes prayer. The Psalmist bids us to "Pray for the peace of Jerusalem: May they prosper who love you. Peace be within your walls and quietness within your towers."

In last week's Tuesday Noon Bible Study on Zoom, we unpacked some of these distinctions between vigilance and anxiousness. Several in the group were drawn to the Psalm, asking questions about the Psalmist's use of the word "prosper." We discussed how we cannot know God's prosperity without first rejecting the world's prosperity.

True vigilance, then, resists the false comforts of our shallow, materialist culture with its addiction to greed and overconsumption, and it repudiates conspicuous wealth generated on the backs of the poor.

One Bible Study participant kept returning to the Psalmist's phrase, "Peace be within your walls and quietness within your towers." In so doing, she named her personal hunger for silence and stillness this Advent. She noticed that the reference to "Jerusalem's towers" could be interpreted as a metaphor for our bodies, one of the places where Christ's advent is revealed in silence and stillness.

One grace of God's gift of vigilance is the capacity to prioritize silence and stillness simply to dwell in God's presence. Where might we be vigilant in carving out space and time to retreat from the commercial chaos of the season to listen for God's still, small voice?

One of my grandpa's gifts to me was the slow and gentle way he moved through the world. We could drive around for hours just listening to Classic King FM, or his Pavarotti 8-track entitled "King of the High C's!" Or we might feed stale bread to the mallards living in a pond not far from my grandparent's house. We could fill this time with conversation, singing, or silence, all of which came to us with natural ease.

I always knew, even if I didn't have language for expressing this idea as a child, that grandpa's steadfast qualities went deeper than his occasional penchant for worry. Like every human, my grandpa could manifest vigilance as anxious concern. However, his true vigilance showed up as his faithful commitment to follow Christ in this life and the next.

I find myself revisiting him this Advent as my tutor in Christian vigilance. I'm rediscovering his grounded spirit and drawing on that steadfast energy to nurture my relationship with Christ. Fostering meaningful relationships is ultimately what Christian vigilance is about.

And so, I wonder, what relationship, living or passed on, might you nurture to help you discover the meaning of vigilance this Advent? How might the living memory or active experience of that relationship also nurture your relationship with Christ?

Our vigilance for nurturing any relationship begins with our relationship with Christ. This is the

ultimate grace of practicing Christian vigilance. It's about getting to know the one whose Advent we yearn for, even as Christ's Advent *is already ours*.

Now that's something to jump and shake your hands about!



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