

Troy E. Medlin
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Shaken Awake by the Word

Beloved in Christ, I offer these words in the name of the Holy Trinity one God. Amen.

I can get jumpy easily. Any commotion or noises in the middle of the night and I am shaken awake. Usually it is nothing. But, it is no fun to be awakened and surprised.

And I can even get that way during the day. If I am focusing on something intensely and then someone comes around the corner. I'm known to get a little spooked.

When I was growing up, every night around bedtime my brother would check to make sure the door was locked. It became like a ritual. Oftentimes he would be the one to turn the deadbolt and make sure we were all safely *in* for the night. And everything else stayed *out*. We anticipated that clicking noise. Now we could all sleep soundly. At least if I woke up I would be comforted by the knowledge of the locked door. And I'd be less spooked.

Easily startled or not I'm sure we all check our dead bolts. And, you and I probably do not spend much energy thinking much more about our own safety and security until of course it is violated. And then it becomes like second nature to look over our shoulder and be on alert. We become jumpy.

If we have lived any amount of time in this world marked by sin at every turn we have had that sense of safety robbed from us in some way. Our house gets broken into, a loved one is taken from us too soon. The job is given to someone else, you don't pass the test. Because of zip code or the cruelty of chance security is only a dream deferred again and again.

A nightclub that was more like a sanctuary for some among us becomes a site of yet another mass shooting. Even I admit to being a bit on edge and more vigilant walking in the pride parade last year because of the rapid increase in threats and hate crimes against LGBTQ folks in this country.

There is also a more subtle and insidious side to security. Especially for those of us who live mostly upper middle class lives of relative ease blending in with everyone else. Security becomes wrapped up not in people but in protecting our possessions at all costs, it can become an

idol that acts as a fortress. No wonder the doorbell camera industry is poised to be worth 4 billion dollars by 2030.

It can be a bit jarring to come to worship during Advent. When everything around us is pushing the bright and cheery. We gather in deep midnight blue, mirroring the earth as it enters its winter hibernation. Light grows dim. Advent is nothing if not true to our experience when we are honest though.

Longing, anticipation, waiting. We know these with every fiber of our being. We long for the day when divided families are reconciled, we anticipate the day when we can be done with constant doctors appointments and wondering what this test will show or that diagnosis will mean, we wait for the day when we no longer have to worry about whether we are safe to walk around as the person God has made us to be without fear of objectification or bullying. When anti-semitism will be no more. And, with conflict in Ukraine and Yemen we plead with Isaiah for the day when they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more.

We also know what it is like to be lulled asleep by the continuous bombardment of news, information, and suffering that leaves us stunned. And we have to battle to stay awake. Often losing. We want to wall ourselves off and escape.

Alarming all the more is where we find Jesus. The thief. The one knocking down the door. The one who is coming to break into our house at an unexpected hour. Not the robber we might expect. The one we most need to intrude upon our own time and personal space that we protect with clenched fists.

Shaken awake by the word we jump out of bed in the middle of our night and realize the one standing before us is the only one who can bring us salvation beyond all our narrow definitions and tightly held convictions and a future that is more certain and enduring than anything that seeks to lay eternal claim on you and me.

After all, how else are we going to be truly free unless he comes to take from us all of the things that rob us of lasting life in the first place and bring us with him into a resurrection life that we cannot create or muster up but only receive pure gift. His wounded hands are here to loosen ours. We can drop it.

As one Lutheran Pastor put it: “the good news is that Jesus has been stalking this world, and there will be a break-in. The promise of Advent is we get robbed -- there was and is and will be a break in-- this God is not interested in our loss-prevention programs, but in saving us from ourselves and our culture and all that we look too for ultimate meaning but leave us wanting

more. This holy thief wants to steal from us and maybe that is literal and metaphor at the same time. In this season of ridiculous levels of consumption, maybe the idea that Jesus wants to break in and steal some of your stuff is really good news.”

This break-in will culminate in his death and resurrection. He will even find his way into hell itself and plunder it, breaking sins deadbolt, all the while setting the prisoners free. Including you, today.

To paraphrase Martin Luther: “I know a bigger thief than death, the one who robs death itself.”

If death is plundered everything changes. Joined to that cross and empty tomb we know our destination is clear. The vision in Isaiah is a promise made good in christ. From the hill outside of the city, to the empty garden tomb, to your baptism and mine-- our own birth into Christ's Advent: the great reversal has begun.

The alarm bells are ringing. I'm a little jumpy! Get up, stand up, sing! As the final Advent draws near there is no time to sleep through our days. We have nothing left to lose. If death is just a doorway into God's tomorrow then we can join our God at work at the ends of the world. There the Spirit gives us all we need to startle this world awake as weapons are turned into gardening tools, words are transfigured into prophetic speech, and the impossibility of grace given with no strings attached begins to take root.

The future is not safe. It's so much better than that.