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Awake With Promise

The first Sunday of Advent raises a host of questions.

I wonder if reading and contemplating this Sunday's gospel text qualifies as *doomscrolling*. (Thanks to Ben Stewart for connecting doomscrolling with the first Sunday of Advent) Reading about yet another home invasion. If the owner of the house had only stayed awake, then their house would not have been broken into. You don't want to be like that person, do you? Stay awake, therefore. Maybe this person should invest in an upgraded security system so they can be woken up at the first sign of an intruder. Do they know about Stand Your Ground laws- so they can be prepared to defend themselves?

I must confess, saying these words out loud makes me anxious. I did inherit my dads keen ability to be startled. It doesn't make me feel good or equipped to be a good neighbor though. The "on edginess" is quite distracting. I wonder if this is the only way to interpret this startling text. I don't imagine this is exactly the reaction that Jesus is going for.

One article from last year explains "Researchers found that doomscrolling or frequent focus on negative news was linked to feelings of existential anxiety, distrust and suspicion of others." Vigilance breeds suspicion. Not welcoming Christ.

Statistically speaking our world is safer than it was twenty years ago, but most of us feel less safe. We don't live in a time where strangers often randomly knock on your door or where friends often show up unannounced. Let alone in the middle of the night. Yet we do live in an age of hyper surveillance.

It's not only NextDoor Apps that make us suspicious of our neighbors but a whole algorithm driven reality- true or not. Many of us are guarded for good reason. We protect what is valuable to us.

As we begin our preparation for the coming of Christ no one would fault us for getting impatient. We long for the coming of Christ. We yearn for the reign of God to break into our lives. When the vision from Isaiah is reality. When swords are beaten into plowshares, spears into pruning hooks. When all weapons of violence in all their forms are fashioned into gardening tools. Enough with the waiting. Can't we just get there already? Our world robs us of peace and safety

in a thousand different ways. The tired ways of sin and death are exhausting. Waiting doesn't get easier.

Growing up my brother would ritually lock the deadbolt of our front door before heading upstairs to bed. We are tempted to do that too. When thieves abound in myriad disguises it's easy to retreat. When we do that we tend to pick up weapons of tongue or heart waging our defense. Standing our ground. Going further inward. Another question. What if Jesus is the thief- and what if his break in is good news and life-saving. What if it happens and will one day too? In Jesus Christ- God has already broken into this world. In his own death and resurrection he has plundered death itself- robbing it of its hold on us. Death has been emptied/looted of its power. To paraphrase Luther- "I know a bigger thief than death, the one who robs death itself."

The good news is that today, not tomorrow, Jesus insists on finding his way to you. No obstacle can thwart God's promise for you. Yes, -he will come again at the end of the age he joins you today in the shadowy nights you know too well. Apart from your own effort, striving, or even wakefulness Jesus draws near to you. Comes close. God is with us. This God is persistent. Jesus wraps you up in his arms even while he gives his own life for you. Jesus Christ is God for you through all your seasons.

This thief comes interrupting our slumber with exactly what we need. Forgiveness. Spaciousness. He comes to you in this meal and the stranger. Christ is truly present. Born for you in your vulnerable flesh. In your weakness and frailty Christ arrives unbidden. In the cross and empty tomb and in this community broken open in love. Fragments given away. As we bear one another's burdens. In your abiding care of one another- Christ is truly present.

Christ comes to take those things that steal your lasting life. What might Christ rob us of today? Resentment? Desire for revenge? Rumors of war? Indifference towards others? Perfectionism? Self-righteousness? Come Lord Jesus! In baptism- you have put on Christ and so have they. Clothing that will cover you in life and in death- and that nothing can take from you.

In these clothes suspicion is turned into curiosity. We are ready- no matter the hour to meet Christ disguised in a thousand faces. May we have the joy of having the doors of our hearts knocked open by neighbors who are Christ offering gifts too numerous to count. Dressed like this it is always time to serve or be served. In Doomscrolling we look down- now we look out- for each other. We teach each other how to welcome Emmanuel- and even how to nourish the soil of new creation in earth's midnight. All out in the open.

I recently read an essay entitled "The Stranger Who Knocked on My Door and Changed My Life." A story about an encounter at the threshold. May we be so blessed. Wake up: the resurrection raid has already begun. Christ is coming soon- might as well undo the deadbolt.