

First Sunday of Advent sermon “The Quiet Work of Advent”
From Matthew 24:36–44 and Psalm 122
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If you walk into a house after Thanksgiving but before Christmas, you can tell something’s going on—even if it’s quiet.

There are boxes out of the closet. A half-strung garland on the table. Flour on the counter, a cooling rack ready for cookies that aren’t baked yet. It’s not Christmas. It doesn’t look finished. But the work has already started.

Most of what makes Christmas beautiful is work that happens behind the scenes—ordinary, unglamorous, quiet. Lists, errands, small decisions, extra dishes. The slow, hidden work adds up to one bright moment. Advent is like that.

Advent is the church’s way of saying:
“There is quiet work going on. God is doing something, even if it’s not finished, even if it doesn’t look like much yet.” The question is: are we paying attention?

“No One Knows the Day or the Hour”

In Matthew 24, Jesus says: “But about that day and hour no one knows, neither the angels of heaven, nor the Christ, but only the Creator.”

People have turned that into charts and timelines—trying to get as close as possible to knowing what Jesus just said we can’t know. But Jesus doesn’t say this so we’ll predict the future. He says it so we’ll learn how to live in the present.

Jesus talks about the days of Noah. People were eating and drinking and getting married—life rolling along. Not necessarily wicked, just distracted. Preoccupied. Busy. Nobody noticed what God was doing right in front of them.

Then those simple images:

- Two people in the field
- Two women grinding grain
- One is ready, one isn’t
- Same job, same place, different heart posture.

It’s less about who “gets picked.” It’s more about who is awake to God and who is sleepwalking through life. So Jesus says: *“Keep awake, therefore, for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming.”*

And that’s Advent in one line: **Stay awake. Stay attentive. Keep watch.**
Not scared. Not decoding secret messages.
Just awake to the quiet work of God.

The Loud Season and the Quiet God

Our culture’s version of this season is not quiet.

The ads are loud.

The schedules are loud.

The pressure to be cheerful is loud.

We talk about “the magic of the season,” but a lot of people are tired, grieving, anxious, or numb. Into all that noise, the church lights one candle and says, “Welcome to Advent.”

Not instant Christmas.
Not a Hallmark movie ending.
Advent.

A season that says:

God is not in a hurry.

God is not panicking.

God does some of God's best work in the dark, quiet, in-between times.

Advent is the church standing in a frantic world and saying, "We're going to slow down on purpose. We're going to pay attention. We're going to wait and watch." Not because nothing is happening, but because so much is happening under the surface.

Psalm 122: Go Up to the Quiet Center

Psalm 122 gives us another picture.

*"I was glad when they said to me,
'Let us go to the house of the Lord.'"*

You can feel the longing. Pilgrims are going up to Jerusalem. They're leaving their fields, their routines, their worries, and heading toward the place that reminds them: "We belong to God. God's promises still stand. We're not alone."

Then the psalm turns to this prayer:

"Pray for the peace of Jerusalem...

Peace be within your walls...

For the sake of my relatives and friends I will say, 'Peace be within you.'"

They are praying for **peace**.

Not bigger armies.

Not more control.

Peace.

This is the quiet work of God:

Building peace.

Stitching communities together.

Teaching people to forgive, to listen, to care.

And where does that prayer start? In worship.

Before anything "out there" changes, something "in here" begins to change:

Their focus shifts.

Their hearts soften.

Their imagination opens to the possibility that God really can bring peace.

That's Advent.

Before the big moment, before the manger, before angels and shepherds—God is already at work in the quiet places: hearts, homes, churches, communities.

Advent as a Quiet Construction Site

If you've ever watched a building go up, you know there's a long stage where it looks like nothing exciting is happening. A fenced-off lot. Some trenches. Piles of dirt. Maybe some concrete forms. It's not pretty. But that's the foundation. The part you never see when it's finished. If that's not done well, nothing else holds.

Advent is God's quiet construction site.

We see four Sundays, a wreath, a few extra hymns.

God sees foundation work:

Deeper trust

Real hope

Lasting peace

We want the finished building. God starts with the foundation. We want Christmas morning. God starts with a pregnant teenager in Nazareth and a baby in a manger.

The Kingdom of God rarely arrives with a marching band. It usually begins quietly.

So What Does “Keeping Awake” Actually Look Like?

What’s it mean to stay awake in Advent?

Jesus doesn’t tell the disciples to camp on a hill and stare at the sky. He talks about people in the field, grinding grain—doing their normal work. So staying awake is less about doing huge dramatic things and more about doing ordinary life with a different kind of attention. Let me name a few simple, quiet practices.

1. A Few Minutes of Real Silence

What if, every day in Advent, you gave God five quiet minutes?

No phone.

No TV.

No multitasking.

Just pause. Maybe light a candle. Simply pray,

“Lord, I’m here. Help me notice You.”

You might feel like “nothing” is happening. But that’s foundation work. That’s God quietly shaping a heart that’s more awake.

2. One Hidden Act of Kindness a Day

Jesus ties readiness to faithfulness in small things.

What if, each day in Advent, you did one quiet act of love for someone—something they might not even notice or thank you for?

Doing the chore no one likes

Giving a little extra generosity

Offering a kind word instead of a sharp one

That’s Advent work. That’s joining God’s quiet Kingdom.

3. One Step Toward Peace

Psalm 122 says, “Pray for the peace of Jerusalem.” For us, that might be, “Pray for the peace of this home, this church, this town, this heart.”

Is there a relationship that’s strained?

Someone you’re avoiding?

A conversation you’ve postponed?

You may not be able to fix everything, but you can take one small step:

A text

A call

An apology

A decision to stop replaying that old hurt

That’s staying awake to God’s work of peace.

4. Showing Up for Worship as if It Matters

“I was glad when they said to me, ‘Let us go to the house of the Lord.’”

On paper, worship is simple: songs, prayers, Scripture, sermon, maybe communion.

But underneath, God is doing quiet work:

Recentering us
Reminding us who we are
Binding us together
Feeding us with Christ's presence

Every time you drag yourself here—tired, distracted—you're stepping into the quiet work of Advent and saying, "I'm available. I'm here."

And Jesus loves to meet people who simply show up.

Christ Is Quietly Closer Than We Think

Did you notice this detail? Jesus calls Himself "your Lord." "*You do not know on what day your Lord is coming.*" Not a distant stranger. Your Lord. The One who already knows you, loves you, died and rose for you.

Advent isn't just about some future date on God's calendar.

It's about recognizing that Christ is already near.

- Near in the neighbor you'd rather ignore
- Near in the person you've been praying for
- Near in the Scripture and sacraments of this season
- Near in the quiet nudges of the Holy Spirit

The same Jesus who will come again in glory is the Jesus who comes to us now in very ordinary ways: bread and cup, candles and carols, acts of mercy and justice, simple prayers.

So when we "keep awake," we're not staring at the sky waiting for a stranger.

We're staying alert to a Friend who is already here and who will one day finish what's been started.

A Small Candle in a Dark Room

This morning, we lit the first Advent candle. Just one small flame. In a dark room, that one flame doesn't erase all the shadows, but it changes everything. It pushes the darkness back. It says, "The dark doesn't get the last word."

That's what Advent is.

The world may feel like Matthew 24—unpredictable, unsettling, out of control. We may feel scattered or numb. But the quiet work of God has already begun.

In Christ, the light has already come into the world.

In Christ, the Kingdom has already been planted.

In Christ, peace has already been declared.

Our job is not to make everything happen.

Our job is to stay awake to what God is doing and to join in the quiet work.

So this Advent, I invite you:

- Take a few minutes of silence each day.
- Do one hidden act of kindness.
- Take one step toward peace.
- Show up for worship expecting God to meet you.

Trust that beneath the noise and the busyness, beneath the headlines and the to-do lists, God is quietly, steadily at work—building peace, growing hope, deepening love. The Quiet Work of Advent is happening—right now, in this church, in your life. May we... may we be awake enough to see it. Amen.