

*“Keep Awake House Church!”*

**1<sup>st</sup> Sunday of Advent - Hope**

**Virtual Liturgy**

**November 29, 2020**

**Advent Theme:**

*“Still Connected as We Prepare Ye The Way of The Lord”*

**Rev. Floren “Tino” C. Cordova, Pastor**

**Iao United Church of Christ**

**Ephesians 1:15-23**

**Matthew 25:31-46**

**Poem “*First Sunday of Advent Prayer of Hope*” adapted from  
**Crosswalk.com****

*“Creator, let your hope arise in our hearts! Lift our eyes up to see that you alone are where our hope comes from. Help us to shake off the anxiety, discouragements, and distractions that have filled this year.*

*May we pause to remember that we have hope in you.*

*You know the end of our stories, and we give thanks because you have promised that it will be a victorious ending. Give us the grace we need to wrap up this year joyfully.*

*We invite your Spirit into this beautiful Advent season. Renew our sense of holy anticipation! Let us be those who are waiting eagerly for Jesus to come again.*

*More than anything, we ask that you be glorified in this season of expectation in this time of pandemic. Amen.”*

I would like to begin this morning with a story about a young professional woman from Ohio who decided to seek her fortune, discern her vocation, and potentially change her life for the better by moving to England. She relocated to London where she began to pursue an advanced degree, seeking new opportunities in the working world.

One of the things she took with her from the Midwest was an insatiable love for the Chicago Cubs professional baseball team. She followed the games on the internet, listening to the live feed. The problem with this arrangement was that, when the games began, often around seven or eight o'clock in the evening in the United States, it was one or two o'clock the following morning in London. That made for a very late — or early — bedtime.

In the year when the Cubs were about to qualify for the World Series, she eagerly tuned in to listen to the games that would decide which teams would qualify. But she'd been listening to every Cubs game that year, all broadcast in what was the middle of the night where she lived. After tuning in to the game that was to seal the Cubs' fate, the inevitable happened. She fell asleep and awoke only in time to hear the post-game wrap-up. The Cubs had won. They were in the Series. She had missed all the excitement.

On her Facebook account she lamented, “I’ve waited years for a moment like this, and of course I slept through it!”

I can relate to this woman’s story. Many of you know that I am a big Wisconsin Badgers’ fan and a big Green Bay Packers’ fan. The technology today allows me to record the games if I know I am going to be preoccupied with other things and then watch them later. Then I get a text on my phone that my team either won or lost – which then there is no need to watch the recording. Just like our virtual worship services remain recorded online so that our brothers and sisters from our virtual world in other time zones can watch them at their convenience. The woman in the story was a devoted Cubs fan – she did not want to miss any of the important details of the games – only to fall asleep when it really mattered.

Beloved Iao Church, beloved brothers and sisters in our virtual world, maybe some of us can relate to the devotion of this woman? The question for us might be, what keeps us awake that we do not want to miss out on an important event? How about this – is our church awake for what may come next for us? Are we readily able to receive God’s next call and are we capable of change in this time of pandemic? Let me ask this vital question – how much of a fan are we for the Iao UCC team?

You see beloved community, the first part of our reading in the Gospel of Mark seems to describe the second coming of Christ. In theological terms, we know this as parousia - (the reappearance of Jesus as judge for the Last Judgment, Second Advent , Second Coming , Second Coming of Christ). The temple of Jerusalem will be destroyed but the temple that is Christ – the body of Christ – the cornerstone of our faith shall return. The description in Mark paints a heavenly – a heavenward picture. Just like the story above when the woman stayed up late or early in the morning to get every bit of news about her favorite baseball team, she waited with anticipation on any news that would come. She tried to remain awake and vigilant, but her humanness had other ideas. Jesus was now describing a scene that would make people want to stay awake – the second coming. We can imagine seeing that scene in our minds...Amen Church? Watching Jesus coming down from a cloud – but are we spiritually awake beloveds? We sometimes have a problem in remain spiritually awake and vigilant our inability to remain focused – like the woman in the story we have a tendency to push ourselves over our limit and forget about self-care, both physically and spiritually and fall asleep. Our Advent then of “still connected as we Prepare Ye The Way of the Lord”

means that even from our House Churches and as deployed people of God – we must not worry about the when and where Jesus will come – but to always be prepared and ready. Recalling from last week about authenticity and credibility – preparation and ready means that the church is feeding, taking care of the poor, calling on our elders and checking in on them, checking up on our youth. I believe the preparation that we are to look for or focus on is “are we being a church for the world today?”

Israel will become engulfed with wars; the followers of Christ will be persecuted by the Romans and by its own religious leaders. The disciples except for John, who will be marooned on an island, the disciples will eventually be arrested and taken away, eventually killed. No matter the pandemic – the situations we encounter Iao Church, we must keep awake and remain focused and vigilant on mission and ministry. Let us be wise in our approach to our call for our time – our time of wearing a mask, social distancing, yet still being the church for our time – more than ever. It is important to rest when our body needs to rest. We cannot be like the woman in the story and stay awake until our bodies are exhausted, we must be wise in our service to God. We must make sure that everyone in our Iao UCC team is well rested for the Advent journey to come.

Preparation that includes spiritual and physical rest. The cosmic second coming of Christ, the Parousia never happened during the disciples time and it may not happen during our time – but we must remain focused and ready with mission and ministry.

Beloved church, beloved brothers and sisters out in our virtual world, the thing about watching and waiting is that God surprises us with “wow” moments when we least expect them. When we get tired and weary – God has a way of motivating us and helping us get back to mission and ministry. God’s energy helps us stay awake. Our lesson for this year has been finding ways to be “the church” from our House Churches. It is true that we sometimes fall asleep from our mission and ministry – we call it out for what it is, we are human beings that fall short, but we get ourselves back up.

And so we close with this Iao Church, our brothers and sisters in our virtual world. Advent is a message that reminds us to remain vigilante and be prepared. Knowing that we fall asleep at times, both physically and spiritually, but also knowing that we need to remain focused and allow God to guide us in the direction the world needs for our time. Most of all beloveds, let us all be prepared to receive God’s many blessings – for every day is a day

in which blessings of hope are all around us. Keep awake – but get some rest for our Advent Journey is upon us.

**Amen, Amene, Ashe, A-ho, and Alleluia.**