



“THE NIGHT SHIFT”
SCRIPTURE: LUKE 21: 25-36
GRACE COVENANT PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH, ASHEVILLE, NC
Sunday, November 28, 2021, Advent One
The Rev. Dr. Marcia W. Mount Shoop, Pastor

Luke 21:25-36

21:25 "There will be signs in the sun, the moon, and the stars, and on the earth distress among nations confused by the roaring of the sea and the waves.

21:26 People will faint from fear and foreboding of what is coming upon the world, for the powers of the heavens will be shaken.

21:27 Then they will see 'the Son of Man coming in a cloud' with power and great glory.

21:28 Now when these things begin to take place, stand up and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near."

21:29 Then he told them a parable: "Look at the fig tree and all the trees;

21:30 as soon as they sprout leaves you can see for yourselves and know that summer is already near.

21:31 So also, when you see these things taking place, you know that the kingdom of God is near.

21:32 Truly I tell you, this generation will not pass away until all things have taken place.

21:33 Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.

21:34 "Be on guard so that your hearts are not weighed down with dissipation and drunkenness and the worries of this life, and that day catch you unexpectedly,

21:35 like a trap. For it will come upon all who live on the face of the whole earth.

21:36 Be alert at all times, praying that you may have the strength to escape all these things that will take place, and to stand before the Son of Man."

The Word of the LORD.

Thanks be to God.

The Night Shift--A Poem in Four Parts

Part One

Dream while you are awake
Jesus teaches
Stay awake in your deepest sleep
Spirit invites
Evoking a mind never resting
From its journey to believe

Faith is built on imagination
And God is a dream
And a wakeful intuition
A mysterious poetry
Of better days
A better way

Our ancestors dreamed
Apocalypses spinning into
Gospel accounts
And tea leaves mistakenly
Read and said to be premonitions

What if the world has always been
On the edge of calamity
What if apocalypse
Is always now
A way to orient ourselves

In the tumult we are
Like feathers and cement
Flying, floating, stuck,
Hardened, cracking
Paving pathways and lost
From the warmth we used to know.

Advent is dreaming
Advent is apocalypse
Advent is waiting
It is watching
And picking ourselves up
On the move again into an unknown world.

Advent is trusting
It is remembering
Advent is coming to the sacred fire
To hear the story again of
Where we come from and where
We believe we are going

Prepare the way
God is gestating
Coming soon to a world near you
Redemption is being born
In the unexpected and long awaited.
The night shift finds us.

Can you see at night?
Do you dream in the harsh unfiltered light
Of these days?
Stay awake to your dreams
Advent is learning to believe
In the dark.

Part Two

Last night I dreamed of a rainbow
The deepest, most vivid, complete rainbow
I have ever seen
I could see the left side and that it stretched boldly across the sky

Clouds and trees obscure it, but I know she is there
This strong, vivid reminder
Of a world in full color
A universe that knows how to
Dazzle us

My mother is in the kitchen
At a sink with a window looking out
In the direction of the rainbow

The land is flat--like Kansas
In the Wizard of Oz

I desperately want her to see the rainbow.
"Look!" I say to her. Look at the rainbow.
It is so spectacular--but in my dream
I was at once filling in the blanks of what I cannot see
And living an immediate intuition of what is actually there.

We go outside, a screen door to a yard
With an old tree, maybe fallow in the winter
Maybe dead but we couldn't part with it.
The second we get outside
There are thick grey clouds obscuring the rainbow.
There is a split second when I feel
Accused of something--that I had made it up,
That it was all just in my imagination.

In my dream I can feel the strength of my convictions.
The fire of knowing something to be true
And then I spot again, the solid
Bands of deep color
As if painted on the sky in thick
Flat veneer
The rainbow is definitely real

But my mother and I can't see it together
At once I am there all alone
On that flat land, with the tree
Branches like thick magic marker
Spidering along the horizon
Tracing and blocking my view
The only light the moon
A Rainbow at night

Impossible
Visceral
Fleeting
Abiding
Like a tornado come and gone

My alarm goes off and the sermon continues.

Part Three

You might wonder why we begin Advent in apocalypse.
It seems a strange place to start, doesn't it?
Why begin this sweet, tinsel journey to Christmas morning
In the jarring glare of such challenging, stark
Clarion call.

The ancestors marked time in apocalypse--unfiltered moments
When faith is our only food, our only map
When the world is on edge--and the night
Has absorbed what we thought we could see.
Grandmother wisdom and grandfather vision
Would teach us again how to work in the dark.

Look back, they tell us, to the ways Creator moves
In hard times, when the world feels like
It is coming to some grotesque culmination
Remember, they tell us, how God uses
These sharp edges of darkness and light.
Imagine, they remind us, that you were born in darkness.
And you will be born again in that deep murky twilight

The world is turning, grandmothers tell us
The world is burning, grandfathers warn.
And we are confronted again, how will you live differently
If you believe that our Redeemer is coming soon?
If it is today, what changes for you?
If it is tomorrow, will you dream tonight of a different world
Or will sleep be dulled by the drunken soak of the worries of life
Drowning our imaginations in false loyalties and dead efforts.

Part Four

We begin Advent in apocalypse because we have lost
Our connection to the imagination this sacred journey requires.
We are not here for the folly of accumulation or recognition,
Or the gluttony of possession or power.
We are here to welcome the turning of time
That never stops inviting us to love.
Tender and corporeal.
Aching and ethereal.
We have forgotten that we dream together
In our sequestered night times
Our imaginations collaborating in the inscrutable
Distance between us
And God is moving, darning
Seaming, mending
The garment that dresses humanity
For this dissonant friendship
With a world, absurd and elegant.

Apocalypse is about waking up,
Lucid dreaming
Imagination infused with Holy Mystery
And history and herstory and our story
And the best worst memories and aspirations
Of sleeping to wake up to ourselves
And waking up to dream.

Deep slumber awakens an undefended you
We give ourselves to the vulnerability we
Fight off in our awakened insecurity
And we rest in a risky trust that our bodies
Are wired to require.

You can go hungry
But you can't go without sleep.
Eventually the body surrenders
To that tidal wave of unconsciousness
And our bodies release hormones and muscle memory
Of rest and cataloguing experience
And strange inspiration.

When things get worse
We wake up to our deepest longings.
When the shadows come
We are enveloped in a reprieve
From our delusion and confusion
And equipped for another day that will
Give itself to night again.

A reprise of a primal drum beat
God will soon
Birth a new world
Where terror is dissolved into
An ocean of trustworthy love
And a morning new with truth,
And hints of a world we had imagined
In the night.

Thanks be to God.