

Good Shepherd Presbyterian Church

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November 30, 2008

1st Sunday of Advent

Isaiah 64:1-9

¹O that you would tear open the heavens and come down, so that the mountains would quake at your presence— ²as when fire kindles brushwood and the fire causes water to boil— to make your name known to your adversaries, so that the nations might tremble at your presence! ³When you did awesome deeds that we did not expect, you came down, the mountains quaked at your presence. ⁴From ages past no one has heard, no ear has perceived, no eye has seen any God besides you, who works for those who wait for him. ⁵You meet those who gladly do right, those who remember you in your ways. But you were angry, and we sinned; because you hid yourself we transgressed. ⁶We have all become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous deeds are like a filthy cloth. We all fade like a leaf, and our iniquities, like the wind, take us away. ⁷There is no one who calls on your name, or attempts to take hold of you; for you have hidden your face from us, and have delivered us into the hand of our iniquity. ⁸Yet, O LORD, you are our Father; we are the clay, and you are our potter; we are all the work of your hand. ⁹Do not be exceedingly angry, O LORD, and do not remember iniquity forever. Now consider, we are all your people.

Mark 13:24-37

²⁴"But in those days, after that suffering, the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, ²⁵and the stars will be falling from heaven, and the powers in the heavens will be shaken. ²⁶Then they will see 'the Son of Man coming in clouds' with great power and glory. ²⁷Then he will send out the angels, and gather his elect from the four winds, from the ends of the earth to the ends of heaven.

²⁸"From the fig tree learn its lesson: as soon as its branch becomes tender and puts forth its leaves, you know that summer is near. ²⁹So also, when you see these things taking place, you know that he is near, at the very gates. ³⁰Truly I tell you, this generation will not pass away until all these things have taken place. ³¹Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.

³²"But about that day or hour no one knows, neither the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. ³³Beware, keep alert; for you do not know when the time will come. ³⁴It is like a man going on a journey, when he leaves home and puts his slaves in charge, each with his work, and commands the doorkeeper to be on the watch. ³⁵Therefore, keep awake — for you do not know when the master of the house will come,

in the evening, or at midnight, or at cockcrow, or at dawn, ³⁶or else he may find you asleep when he comes suddenly. ³⁷And what I say to you I say to all: Keep awake."

"On Dasher, On Dancer, On Alert"

Ah the season has arrived. Here we are in Advent. Here we are making ready for Christmas. Here we are with the lights beginning to emerge and the trees already taking shape. Shoppers, ribbons, schedules, music, it all shifts into the seasonal Christmas mode.

With Black Friday behind us the days are now counting down to December 25th. Jingle, jingle bells, jingle all the way. Oh yes, on Dasher, on Dancer, on Alert.

ON DASHER

Dasher. Not the reindeer, oh no, indeed. Dasher. It is more descriptive of what we tend to do in this wonderful season. We dash from one thing to the next. There are, after all, only 25 shopping days until Christmas. There is much to be done. The house has to be decorated—both inside and out. And for inside decorating to take place there is usually some sort of high level involved cleaning along the way.

The family gathering has to be planned. The Christmas cards—oh, those Christmas cards calling out to you to get them finished up (or started) and on the way into the mail. A personal letter/note with each one or one of those generic letters—either way, it still has to be accomplished. Cookies to bake and gifts to come up with—whatever will you get them this year—it is so hard to come up with something new and original every year.

On Dasher—dash at it, dash about, dash on. To dash, oh, to dash is to hurry, to run, to scurry, to hasten, to race, to dart. You are Dasher this season. It is how it is. But does it need to be?

What if this year you dashed a bit less? What if this year you dashed a bit slower? What if you slowed it down? You see, some of this dashing is out own doing. We tend to over-decorate. We tend to over-bake. We tend to over-buy. We tend to over-shop. We tend to over-plan. We tend to over-do. We tend to over-clean. We tend to over-dash.

Slow down. Bake less. Shop less. Decorate less. Lower your expectations of you! A little dust doesn't matter. A Christmas e-mail would be faster than a Christmas card—and a whole lot easier to send. Have people over for simple meals rather than elaborate ones. Remember, Dasher, a finely decorated tree and the perfect present do not make the season bright. The Advent of your God does. The Advent of your God is what makes your season bright.

Oh Dasher, slow it down. Lower your expectations of you so this can be for you a wonderful season.

ON DASHER, ON DANCER

Dancer. It is a dance for sure. It is a dance to try and pull off all we generally try and pull of this time of year. It is the busiest month in which we do the most entertaining, most going, most fulfilling of expectations and obligations...more so than at any other point in the year.

It is a dance in order to try and pull it off. Scheduling alone is a dance that requires some masterful choreography. Which side of the family is having their Christmas get-together when and where and who is to bring what... On the Saturday before Christmas there is both the last minute shopping to do, the grocery store to get to, the office "holiday" party (you cannot call it a Christmas party anymore), oh and lest you forget

you also promised to go to your niece's cousin's daughters dance school rendition of the Nutcracker. It is a dance! For certain it is a dance.

On Dancer! To dance is to move in rhythm and in harmony with another. ...in rhythm and in harmony with another. That other which we are trying to figure out how to move in rhythm and harmony with is usually members of our family, our circle of friends, our co-workers, and our loved ones. But we can also be doing a dance with—trying to move in rhythm and harmony with our schedule, our limited time, our abbreviated energy, and our shrinking resources.

The dance becomes more and more disjointed. The dance becomes more and more discordant rather than harmonious. Let me suggest that we dance on—but that we think purposefully about it. You see, I believe that we really do not dance so much as we more attempt to juggle. It is a juggling act of keeping all the balls in the air and keeping them going and spinning the entire time. We juggle our schedule. We juggle our family. We juggle our obligations. We juggle our busyness. We juggle; we do not dance.

On Dancer. It is time to dance again. Stop juggling. Return to dancing. Or dance for the first time. Not on the dance floor—but in life. Move in rhythm and in harmony with those in your life. Move in rhythm and in harmony with that which is happening in your life. For such rhythm and harmony to be you may need to let go of a few things. You may need to concentrate on fewer dances.

This is not Dancing With the Stars, you do not need to be an expert at the Waltz, the Rumba, and the Foxtrot. No, you need to move in rhythm and in harmony with another.

And do understand—do understand that you cannot move in rhythm and harmony with another unless you can move in rhythm and harmony

with yourself. And do understand, yes do understand that you cannot move in rhythm and harmony with yourself unless you move in rhythm and harmony with God.

There is no inner rhythm or harmony—there is no dance without the author of dance. Until there is that center in God there will be no center for you or any of us. Certainly not one that sustains us through all the juggling that takes place in life, and certainly in this season.

Move in closer. Move in rhythm. Move in harmony. Move in to your partner. Dance with God...allowing God to lead you, allowing God to move you, allowing God to shape your movement. Dance with the God who is your only rhythm and harmony. On Dancer!

ON DASHER, ON DANCER, ON ALERT

“Keep awake.” Those are the warning words of Jesus. “Keep awake.” Not that we are asleep. In truth, the vast majority of us in this culture are actually sleep deprived. We suffer from a society that insists on us being overly-productive and over functioning. This is true so much so that we in our over commitment we do not sleep and are severely sleep deprived.

Some days we struggle to stay awake let alone “keep awake.” The call of Jesus here is to be alert—to be “on alert” to what is happening these days and times. It was and is a call to readiness, preparation, expectation, and anticipation.

Our Book of Common worship begins the liturgy of lighting the Advent Wreath with the simple words of interpretation: “Advent means coming.” “Advent means coming,” it is that simple. As such we wrap our thoughts around that first Advent when the people waited for a Savior. And we rejoice in the humble truth of the incarnation where shepherds were the ones who heard the news first: “For unto you is born this day in

the city of David a Savior who is Christ the Lord. And this shall be the sign, you will find the child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger.”

We ponder the Second Advent when Christ will come, in the words of the Apostle’s Creed, “with glory to judge the quick and the dead.” That Second Advent is one we imagine and anticipate; it is one we question and debate. Will it be so, can it be so, how can it be.

“Keep awake,” Jesus says. So we look for that Second Advent when God will burst through the doors of heaven and make the show of appearance on the scene of our lives. Some days we call for it—longing to see what God can do in order to bring order out of the chaos of our existence. Let the heavens and skies be opened up and get ready for the power of wonder to be upon us all...

Too often this season becomes only a telling about the First Advent, only a memory of what has already taken place. And spectacular as that story is, to only tell that story is not to tell the whole story. That First Advent story, the one of the Christ child in the manger, it signals for us the story that we are to tell about how God has come on the scene of our lives. That story of Bethlehem is to tell the story of Joppatowne. That story of the manger is to tell the story of how God manages to appear in our living.

On alert...keep awake. It is not so much what will happen in 25 days or even about when that great and final day will come. It is about what is happening right now. When was it that God came into your life today? How was it that you saw God move in your world today? In what measure did you meet the living Christ in your home, in your words, in your dreams, in your imagination today? In what way....keep awake, be on alert for that!

We expect that God's arrival and God's activity in our lives will be with fanfare. We expect that God should burst through the front door with the blaze and blast of trumpet. We expect that there should be some great announcement or some holy fire involved. But look at that First Advent—that quiet, humble, in the night arrival of all things, a baby who is to be the Savior.

God arrives in your life everyday. You do not have to wait 25 days to see how God will make an appearance. You need to expect the quiet, even hidden, nature of God who comes in the side or back door of your life.

Are you on alert for that God? Everyday, that God is there making a new appearance, and further incarnation, and a deeper emergence into your reality. Are you on alert for it? Are you awake to it? Do you see it that today already God has come into your existence?

That is the Christmas story—and it is a story about you and how this “Savior who is Christ the Lord” has come to you today. Be on alert to that story. Tell it to yourself, and your house, and your neighbor, and your community.

Tell it and be alert to the God who is your life today.

Keep awake. Be on alert....yes, alert to the God who is your rhythm and harmony.

On Dasher, On Dancer, On alter! Onward! Amen.