



OPENING PRAYER: Pray for any personal needs of your group, church, community, etc.

NOTE: Our insights are important so remember to respect each other's thoughts/reflections.

DISCUSSION:

Jesus called his followers to be alert and aware of the strong desire to become spiritually dull, apathetic and sleepy. When we're not focused on Jesus, it is easy to seek that deeper connection with God's Spirit. The result is we can stop seeing Christ in those around us and being God's people who enrich other's lives.

- Share what is an area of your spiritual life that could do with sharpening, so you can continue to be enriched in your own walk with God and enrich the lives of others.

READ: Luke 3.1-6 (Discuss as many or as few of the following questions as you wish)

- The Herodian dynasty are Edomites not Jews. They gained power in a bloody conflict with Greek kings in 40BC and were kept in power at the behest of the Emperor, Tiberius.
- The High Priests are puppets. According to the historian, Josephus, Annas had been appointed High Priest by Quirinius, later removed by a Roman procurator and replaced by his son-in-law, Caiaphas.
- Herod kept High Priests in his pocket by commissioning a rebuilding of the Temple at huge expense.
- The Romans kept the High Priests in check by allowing Jewish worship to continue but demanded that military flags be hung in the Temple.

DISCUSS:

- In what ways is the world which John the Baptist and Jesus sent amongst similar to the world of today?
- Rather than preparing the way for Jesus in the temple, John did it from the regions and even the desert. Why do you feel this was? Does our church represent a temple or region/desert?
- If John was here today, where would he go, why would he go there and what would he tell people?

CLOSING PRAYER:

- **CHURCH COMMUNITY:** *Though it seems strange to pray for, one of our greatest needs is to form healthy procedures and role descriptions. While we often push against boundaries, these help us know what, why and how to do things for the benefit of the mission and vision God has given us!*
- **VISION 2021** – please choose another area of our churches ministry to pray for.

Lord God, thank you for helping us be a hospitable and loving church.
Our love for you leads us to live generously with our finances, resources, gifts, time
and our lives. Help us receive, own and carry out this vision so that,
we may develop Spiritual Growth and Financial Independence for your glory.

Amen

BE ALERT (Luke 21: 25 - 38)

A young girl asked her Sunday school teacher, "What's a lert?"

"A what?" the teacher asked. "A lert?" she said again.

"Why do you want to know?" asked the bewildered teacher

"Our pastor said that we should 'be alert,' - I want to know what it is, so I can be one!"

Today I'm going to encourage you to be alert. What do I mean by that?

I want to encourage you to consider that your call is to not only be faithful to Christ in how you live on earth – *but to live in a 'heavenly way,' now!*

I was talking to Fiona yesterday and the other LA's last week about our liturgy – it's designed to remind us to *keep alert* through the journey taken in worship.

We're reminded of being - *the body of Christ* - an embodiment of the Lord's Prayer – "*your will be done on earth as it is in heaven*" - *as individuals and one community in Christ*

We're reminded, even in our frail and broken existence; we're called - *chosen* – to be a living reality of Christ presence. *What amazing potential I see before me today!*

Christ asks that we *choose* to be alert - let "Advent" happen in our hearts.

To know we do not have to be afraid or concerned about misunderstanding when is his 2nd coming - *but living in an alert and attentive way to his presence here now.*

The imagery from last week, challenged us to see Christ in his undercover persona of the poor, the lowly, and the outcast.

The scriptures tell us we will be judged by the way we chose to respond to him as he came in the lives of these people whom he called us to share his love with.

This reminded me of a study experiment.

The basic idea was that people were asked to prepare talks about helping others and are then sent around with varying degrees of urgency.

Each person passes an actor posing as someone in need of assistance.

The people's reactions are recorded to determine how much their perceived need to hurry, and the context of what they were asked to do, affected their willingness to aid the "person in need."

Eventually the people finally reach the end where it is explained to them the person in need was an actor who was planted to test their reactions.

Those who did not demonstrate compassion, when they have just spoken about the importance of caring for others, are told they failed.

Rather than seeing Jesus in the poor and outcast, we're given an image of an all-powerful - Son of man - riding upon the clouds, coming in glory - sending out his angels to gather his people from the ends of the earth – our redemption is near.

It's an awe-inspiring prophetic introduction and description of Christ's majesty and we're called to be vigilantly alert in waiting for him.

Have you ever played hand slaps? It's a game – two people put out their hands – one person goes first and has to slap the other hands – if they miss, they swap.

I believe some see Christ's coming like hand slaps.

There is a fear, a sense of anticipation and a little bit of excitement but always some association and sense of fear or anxiety at what awaits us.

While it is understandable to conclude this from our reading, I'm convinced it was not intended to leave us with a sense of threat or terror - *but hope and invitation*.

Perhaps the only imminent threat we have is falling asleep - spiritually.

I remember working at the Mobil petrol station where I did the graveyard shift.

Coming home in the mornings was the worst after working through the night.

I'm driving - my car seat starts to feel really comfortable – it's changing into my bed – it feels so soft – then you wake up from a truck horn as it's coming toward you.

Our challenge is life becomes like a warm and cosy bed we want to fall asleep in.

It isn't until we swerve to the other side of the road – we've done wrong – something God wouldn't want us doing – or we're in danger, trauma, stress - we panic – we wake up.

Jesus says – keep alert, don't fall into the trap of getting spiritually sleepy.

A young girl in our youth group use to do Tae Kwon Do. She loved it as it kept her fit, interacting with others. Sometimes it got her in trouble as her reflexes made her jumpy.

Someone might play around or make a quick action and she'd have them in a head lock or punch them from reflexes. She wasn't trying to hurt people, but her training kept her alert.

She didn't train because she was in danger – she trained to be able to respond if needed

Spiritually speaking, we must train our bodies to be alert – to react so when we need to respond – spiritually and in faith - we are capable of doing so.

As our LIFE group discussed, some Christians can be hyper alert – even jumpy.

They wait on the edge of their seats for Jesus to return - often neglecting the world Jesus called them to care for.

Over the years many people have claimed to know when Jesus was going to return.

It's typical that we want to know more than God wants us to know.

A pastor tells of when there was a small group in a town where he served who had a date when they were convinced Jesus would return to take them to heaven.

A man approached one of the men from this group and said, "If you are certain Christ is coming on this date, why don't you sign your property over to me effective the day after that date since you know you won't be here?"

Not surprisingly he wouldn't do it.

How do we find a balance between not falling asleep and not giving someone an upper cut from being a little over enthusiastic?

A good way to evaluate is to ask two questions:

- Do I give a spiritually mature response to both joys and challenges?
- Are the lives of those around me enriched by my time with them?

In chapters 20 and 21 of Luke, Jesus' is teaching in the temple – he's addressing the hypocrisy of religious people

They say one thing and do another – and are a burden to the lives of those around

Jesus return has much more to do with how we live *now* - *as we wait with expectancy* – it's not about ticking spiritual boxes we think look good or busy - for '*when*' Jesus turns up.

Giving this information about his Second Coming – while addressing the bad behaviour of "*god people*" *wasn't to say* – you better not get on my naughty list.

Jesus knew they were imperfect - and chose them anyway - just as he knows our imperfections - yet chooses us anyway.

It was to remind them (and us) of who they (and we) must choose to be for God.

As we finish this year and look towards Christ's birth, Advent is a mixed bag of joyful anticipation – in the midst of hectic, pressured preparation.

We have dinners, buying gifts, parties, cards, etc.

We will be challenged to balance Christmas preparation with our spiritual preparation.

All of this can be wonderful - and overwhelming

We are called to be *alert* – someone who lets "Advent" happen in their hearts.

A lert is to let God's Spirit dwell within us – to receive Christ's peace - to give us guidance - to say and do and think in ways that honour God - and those around us.

A lert is to offer our weakness, identity and burdens – give them to Jesus knowing only he can give us a vision – and the ability – to change the outcomes – this is spiritual maturity

A lert chooses to deepen their awareness of Christ's presence in their lives and lives not busy in case Jesus comes tomorrow – but because they know he's with them today

How we are alert, determines how our life and the life of those around us is enriched.

God's Spirit is present for us today if we ask for it - even in our broken and frail existence – *what amazing potential I see before me today!*

May Advent be a beautiful time to sharpen your vision - to see Christ presence in all his distressing disguises

be alert – you may be surprised at where you see him – and what he does in you this Advent season.

Let's pray...