

**You Do What You Can....**  
[Text -Matthew 24:36-44]

Pastor Dave Shackle  
November 27, 2016

Throughout his ministry, Jesus declares that the Realm of God is at hand - that a Divine Era of Peace, Joy, and Love is coming, and in fact, has already broken into this world. That's certainly a bold proclamation, particularly considering the condition of the world in which Jesus lives. His homeland is occupied by an oppressive Roman rule; his people are heavily taxed and harshly treated. Even many of the religious leaders around him, who are supposed to be caring for people and easing their burdens, seem more interested in controlling and condemning them, and weighing them down. Nevertheless, Jesus has the audacity to confidently claim that God's gracious and liberating Realm is right there within people's reach.

Now, the one thing that makes Jesus' proclamation both believable, and authentic, is the fact that he himself *embodies* that Divine Spirit of compassion, freedom and joy - in the *midst* of some extremely distressing and discouraging circumstances. Surrounded by widespread suffering and oppression, Jesus responds by reaching-out with amazing compassion, help and healing. Confronted with injustice and intolerance, he passionately advocates for the vulnerable and the downtrodden. And even though personally threatened by the forces of fear, hatred, and violence, Jesus responds with a remarkable Spirit of forgiveness and love, grace and peace.

In the person of Jesus Christ, the Divine *Word* - the Holy Expression of all that is good and true, kind and just - is wrapped in human form and lives among us. Jesus comes to make a decisive difference in this world, by bringing good news to the poor, release to the captive, and wholeness to those whose lives are broken and hurting. *Advent* is a time in which we remember and celebrate the arrival of that Good News; and to do what we can to make it a reality in our world today. For even though Advent is a season of anticipation and waiting, there are two distinctly different ways in which you and I can wait. We can sit and wait doing *nothing*; or we can wait like those who eagerly look forward to the arrival of a special guest or a spectacular event. We can actively get ourselves ready, and prepare our surroundings, for that Promised Day of Divine fulfillment - and by *doing* so, perhaps even hasten its arrival!

You and I can stand-up for the poor, the hungry and the helpless, using our gifts and resources to assist, feed, and encourage them. We can act-out as genuine children of our One Heavenly Parent, by reaching-out to *all* of our sisters and brothers with welcome and kindness, acceptance and grace. We can speak-out against bigotry and injustice, and advocate for more peaceful and constructive uses of our nation's vast riches and resources. Like the owner of the house in Jesus' example, you and I can diligently stay awake and alert, in eager anticipation of Christ's appearance. And like those faithful followers in Jesus' parable of the Final Judgement, you and I can attend to Christ's concerns, by graciously caring for "the least of these, our sisters and brothers." I'll admit, that these are rather lofty goals! Yet I believe you and I can address them on a down-to-earth, day-to-day basis.

This Advent season offers us many concrete opportunities to help our neighbors in need - both near and far. Each Sunday we can *put* hats and scarves and gloves on our Mitten Tree, to be distributed to those less-fortunate. Or we can *take* an ornament from our Giving Tree, and replace it with a gift for a child with special needs at the Prentiss Autism Center, where Darlene Kelly works. Every Sunday, we can help feed hungry people with contributions to our Food Bank. And on

Sunday December 18th, we can prepare and serve a “Hunger Meal” for people gathering at Pearl Road United Methodist Church in Cleveland.

In addition to these things, as a Family of Faith, you and I can watch-out for all those sisters and brothers around us for whom the holidays are a difficult, sad, or lonely time - reaching-out to them with understanding, help and support. And as people of faith, we can step-up our efforts to show compassion and offer hope, in the midst of today’s volatile political and social climate. Through our words and our actions, you and I can remind others [and *ourselves*] of the genuine hope and joy that Jesus Christ offers us. Together, we can make a tremendously positive difference in this world, one small step at a time; thereby revealing Christ’s authentic and ongoing Presence in our world today. After all, this is the real purpose of the Advent Season: To remind us to watch for the signs - and to *become* the signs - of that Divine Realm of compassion, grace and peace; To be prepared to do our humble, yet important part, in making that glorious Realm a genuine reality - right here and right now!