



Joy As Resistance

Pastor John Klawiter

November 27, 2022

First Sunday in Advent

Matthew 24:36-44

Grace and peace to you my siblings in Christ,

On Tuesday night, we took our church directory photos.

They made us sign up for two timeslots to ensure we had enough time to get our photos taken with everyone looking at the camera and properly posed. Thanks to the shenanigans of Sullivan (**SLIDE** of pictures), we almost didn't get one.

But thankfully, we apparently did. It will be fun to see how our picture turned out when the directory is published sometime soon. Did Sully actually give us a nice smile? I'm just as curious as you.

It's nice to be done with this item on our family "to do list." The next month going into Christmas will be busy. The season of waiting is often over in a blink—just like that, these 28 days fly by.

After two full days with a house full of guests for Thanksgiving, the urgency of Advent struck with a vengeance. We faced an unexpected surprise last night.

Something was off with Oliver (**circle Oliver**). Really off. His heart rate was out of control, his temperature spiked, and a panicked, pained look was on his face. We haven't seen this type of reaction from him in a long time.

There was a time early in Oliver's life where he was on hospice. We had prepared by saying goodbye. Yet, eventually he bounced back and graduated. He's been fairly stable the last decade, but we are very cautious with him. For a long time, those signs and warnings had waned.

Last night, those memories and warning signs came rushing back. With a kiddo like Oliver, we just don't know what's in store.

Our quiet Saturday to unwind unwound into a frantic evening trying to rule out anything severe.

Taryn rode with him in an **ambulance (Oli in ambulance)** and I packed up a few essential items and followed a few minutes later in the van.



We left the older girls in charge of the littles and I encouraged everyone to be patient and calm with each other, even if they were tempted to pick fights over the remote or which toys to play with.

In many ways, it was a way to check my own anxiety in the moment.

It's not easy. I'm not always the best at practicing calm in the midst of the storm.

At the hospital, Taryn reminded me of this when I got short with someone and didn't even realize it. The last thing I want to be is ungrateful, yet when I'm worried about what is happening to my kid, my guard comes down.

At first glance, it might seem that Jesus is condemning letting our guard down. We've always gotta be on.

We enter the month before Christmas with a very un-Christmas like reading from Matthew. There's a sense of fear and ominous warning attached to this message from Jesus.

“About that day and hour... no one knows.”

“You do not know what day your Lord is coming.”

“Two will be in the field, one will be taken and one will be left.”

Two women will be grinding meal together; one will be taken and one will be left.

“Be ready, the Son of Man is coming at an unexpected hour.”

Modern storytellers have seized on this passage to stir up Biblical fear-mongering and threatening.

Get it right to make sure YOU are plucked up and not left behind in the field.

Here's the thing, if it were left up to us to make sure we were alert, awake, and completely prepared for this event, I'm not too confident any of us are up to the challenge.

I get a bit snappy when I'm hungry. I clearly get short with well-meaning people when I see my son in pain. I don't trust that I will be on my best behavior at all times and in all places.

I know that if Jesus took me with him to the Garden of Gethsemane to pray, I would've fallen asleep too, just like his disciples.

I'm a horrible example of the perfect Christian.



Thank God it's not about that.

Context matters.

Matthew is a Jewish author writing to a Jewish audience of new believers—believers in the resurrection and that Jesus Christ is the Son of God and the promised Messiah.

Matthew's gospel doesn't jump into the birth of Jesus—he begins by listing the genealogy that goes back to Abraham and connects to Jesus.

Wanna know a secret? There's some really messed up ancestors in his line who've made horrible mistakes.

Matthew knows that his audience knows these people. That their stories of redemption and forgiveness, thankfulness and grace, are the story of his people.

But there's a twist.

Matthew also knows that this destructive event has already happened. Like a scene out of Ukraine after Russian bombings, **the city of Jerusalem faced a similar fate in the year 70 AD** (Siege of Jerusalem).

The “predictions” of the temple being destroyed by Jesus conveniently come true because it really did happen. Matthew's account doesn't appear until between 80-90 AD—at least 10 years AFTER the destruction of Jerusalem.

Do you want to know how Matthew so accurately described what the end times looked like? He lived it.

And he lived.

He lived to tell about it. He lived to tell about how this savior of ours, born from humble beginnings, would be the fulfillment of what was promised.

The destruction of Jerusalem was not enough to destroy the faith of these 2nd generation Christians. They didn't all survive, but enough did. The story carried forward for generations to follow—to this day!

We don't have to be scared. We don't have to bear the weight of the entire future of the church on our shoulders.

We don't have to scare people into believing in the goodness and mercy of Jesus Christ—in fact, I don't think that tactic of evangelism brings out the best features of Christianity.



I think the best in us is seen when we face the fears and challenges of faith and we resist the urge to give up and quit.

I had coffee with a good friend, Pastor Jenny. Pastor Jenny is a dreamer—she's one of the leaders seeking a new Washington County shelter. We talked about the things in our world causing fear and division. War in Ukraine and evil across the world.

Division and anger within our culture. Human rights violations and threats to equality becoming commonplace. Income disparity and the brokenness of our systems to support our neighbors.

Pastor Jenny told me about the importance of her mindset.

Joy can be an act of resistance (Dennis graphic). Joy can be a way to conquer fear and resist those forces that want us to back down and accept our fate.

Pastor Jenny shared how this shift in thinking was healing for her. Joy isn't happiness—or a Pollyanna outlook on life.

Joy, for Pastor Jenny, is the first response she gives—a smile, a positive comment, a dose of grace, when those forces of fear are looking to knock her down and squelch her spirit.

I was excited to think about how this message could change the way we look at our relationships with each other, with our stuff, and even with our bodies—could joy as an act of resistance bring about healthier emotions, and in turn, physical health?

Last night, with the uncertainty of Oliver's health hanging in the balance, it was a great reminder for me to turn to joy in resisting the temptation to fear.

The fear doesn't evaporate—it's not gone. But the fear doesn't get to win.

“Be ready, the Son of Man is coming at an unexpected hour.” Great, bring it on, Jesus.

God isn't seeking perfection. God is seeking preparation.

Have we placed God first? Is our heart pointed to Christ? Do we live for others and the world that God made? Slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love for our neighbors?

Do we serve one another with joy in our hearts that can overcome the temptations of jealousy, suspicion, or coveting?

Prepare to be bombarded with messaging about how to feel, what to give, and what to do (MOA on Black Friday).

We can't always ignore them... but we choose our response.



Choose to be prepared. Choose to be centered on Christ. Choose Joy. Amen.