

Text of a message delivered by Holly Walton for Windsor Park Baptist Church on Sunday 7th December 2025.
The written text may vary from the spoken/video version due to time and flexibility reasons.



Those Who Dream... Keep Awake

Mark 13:32-27

Today we start our Advent series and I am aware that some of you might be wondering what Advent even is! In traditional churches, Advent marks the beginning of the church calendar, and is the 4 weeks leading up to Christmas Day. It is a chance to remember the advent of the birth of Jesus and to dream of his return.

Our Advent series for 2025 is entitled “**Those Who Dream**”. At first glance, this may not seem like an obvious choice for an Advent series.

But actually, the Christmas story is filled with those who dream.

- Joseph and the magi received dreams from God while they slept.
- Mary, Zechariah, and the shepherds received visions—a kind of waking dream.
- And then there were those who held onto the dream of God’s promise of a Messiah, like Simeon and Anna.

This is the kind of dream that Psalm 126:1 is referring to, and where our series title comes from: ***“When the Lord brought back the captives to Zion, we were like those who dream.”***

Here, dreaming seems to be about a hope or a belief beyond what can be seen, and beyond the limits of present circumstances. As the people were set free from captivity, they could hardly believe what God was doing. An impossible dream was coming true before their eyes.

This Advent, we’re invited to consider our own impossible dreams and to ask ourselves: **where is God in our dreaming** and what does it mean for us to live as **those who dream?** Over the next few weeks Aidan and Grant will be looking at

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some of the Biblical dreamers and how their experiences can speak to us, but today we are going to focus on how we can be dreamers dreaming dreams rooted in God's presence and in God's plan for the world.

I loved a line from a devotional that says:

“Those who dream do not fall asleep to the realities of this world.”

Or, put another way: *“Those who dream... keep awake.”*

Those who dream keep awake... That seems like an unexpected twist!

But over and over the Bible presses us to keep awake... awake to the hope and the promise – the dream of the coming Kingdom of God.

In Ephesians 5:14-20 we are encouraged to keep awake to how we are living:

**“Sleeper, awake!
Rise from the dead,
and Christ will shine on you.”**

¹⁵ Be careful, then, how you live, not as unwise people but as wise, ¹⁶ making the most of the time, because the days are evil. ¹⁷ So do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is...

And in Mark 13:32-37 we are told to keep awake to the promise of Jesus' return:

³² “But about that day or hour no one knows, neither the angels in heaven nor the Son, but only the Father. ³³ Beware, keep alert, for you do not know when the time will come. ³⁴ It 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. ³⁵ Therefore, 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, ³⁶ or else he may find you asleep when he comes suddenly. ³⁷ And what I say to you I say to all: Keep awake.”

When Paul says ***“Sleeper, awake, rise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you,”*** and when Jesus says, ***“Keep awake, for you do not know when the master***

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will come,” they’re inviting us to live awake to God’s presence right here in the middle of ordinary life. But that’s not always easy, is it?

Well let me tell you about my holiday...

In October, I went with my husband Mike, our three daughters and their husbands on a trip to South Africa. As we set out, we were overflowing with anticipation, excitement and expectation.

The journey from Torbay to Cape Town began one Saturday morning at 10:30am and after a car trip, a bus ride and a long walk through all the various queues, and a diversion via Maccas we finally made it onto the aeroplane...then we queued and squeezed past the unattainable unimaginable luxury of business class, premium economy, economy stretch, and finally collapsed into cattle class where we found our seats and I prayed (finally prayer entered the story) those guilty futile prayers that no-one would sit next to us or that we’d be upgraded. Please tell me that I’m not the only one!

Finally, the first 10-hour flight began. The sound of the engines and the gentle moving helped me to doze off, until my head would lull forward and with a start I would jerk my head up and I’d be awake...and then back to sleep...this went on until we hit turbulence... not enough to be scary but enough to postpone the hot drink service. Suddenly I was wide awake and desperate for coffee. This pattern of sleepy, drowsy, half wake, awake, asleep, zoned out, drowsy, dopey carried on all the way through that flight, and the next all the way to Cape Town where we finally landed about 30 hours later.

Don’t our years have the tendency to become a bit like that journey – we can start off full of energy and excitement, but then the hours roll on, and the hum of routine lulls us into a kind of **spiritual drowsiness**. We see, but we don’t really see. We hear, but we don’t really listen. We find a kind of comfortable state where we are lulled by the same old safe things and we turn a sleepy eye to the things around us. Days begin to blur into weeks and weeks into months and next thing we find ourselves sleepwalking through our *“one wild and precious life”* to quote one of my favourite poets, Mary Oliver. And this sleepy state can go on until we hit the unexpected turbulence of a job loss, or a diagnosis, or the joy of falling in love or birth of a child...

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Sleeper, Awake!

How do we stay awake - not just in crisis or joy - but in everyday life?

How do we *wake up* to the sensory, emotional, intellectual, spiritual feast God has placed all around us every day?

A good place to start is by waking up to ourselves in our surroundings – because through this noticing, not only do we become aware of ourselves and the world around us, but we also become aware of God.

There's a simple exercise sometimes used at Christian retreats to help with this "waking up" and we're going to give it a go now...

First of all, slowly scan around you and notice 5 things you can see... Now close your eyes and listen for four things you can hear... Now become aware of your sense of touch – your clothes on your skin, the seat beneath you, your shoes on your feet... Breathe in deeply, breathe out... and notice your other senses of smell...and taste.

Open your eyes...Do you feel a little more awake? A little more aware of yourself in your surroundings?

Well now we're going to increase the turbulence a little. We aren't just sensory we are also spiritual... So in the silence of your heart, ask God to help you notice someone around you... Again in silence ask God to show you what to pray for them. And now in your hearts, without moving or speaking out loud, take a moment to pray for that person.

Was that uncomfortable? Surprisingly easy?

...You know every Sunday we gather. We sing to the Lord of all creation, maker of heaven and earth and elephants and all the stars and we sit amongst each other - each created in the image of God, each of us known and intimately loved by God ...

and if we're honest, we don't really notice... Mostly we keep to ourselves or to those we know... What are we afraid of?

Sleeper, Awake!

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When we begin to pray for others - especially those we struggle with - we start to see them differently. We begin to see a little glimpse of what God sees. We **awaken** to the move of God in each other and subsequently we are moved and awoken ourselves.

What if this Advent we were to expand this idea...how might it feel to be awake to the shoppers passing you in the mall, awake to noticing someone that perhaps looks down or tired? What if you were to just quietly pray for them?

Awake to the World

When we make space and time to intentionally pause and be awake to the world around us the most amazing thing starts to happen...we start to awaken to God's fingerprints everywhere. We begin to marvel at the intricate markings on a butterfly's wings, the breathless beauty of a rainbow across a bruised and blackened sky, the Milky Way Galaxy twinkling across space and time.

“When I consider the works of your fingers... what are human beings that you are mindful of them?” (Psalm 8:3–4)

Sleeper, awake!

When we become aware of nature singing and praising God, we begin to feel God's heartbeat for the world. And with that awareness comes sorrow too... Can we be awake to the realities of pollution, deforestation, animal extinction? Can we allow ourselves to be awake to the pain of our planet? Can we hear God's whisper to us in this and do something? Thank you to the earth team for taking the first steps in helping us awaken and respond to our planet's pain.

When we wake up to the billions of people around us each created in the image of the Creator ... then war, famine, poverty, human rights abuses, trafficking, natural disasters all look different... because they are happening to people that God loves unconditionally, just like you or me.

Being awake can be uncomfortable.

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It can feel overwhelming. How do we hold all this input and knowledge and all the images - staying awake to the pain without becoming overloaded? It is overwhelming. How can we allow these things to wake us up?

One way is to pray as you scroll...Don't just allow the pain and the devastation to become one great big blur as you scroll... Ask God to give you prayers to pray for each news article as you go, find the good stories too and give thanks.

And if being awake to the news is too much, then return to the world around you. Notice again: five things you can see, four sounds, three sensations. Reconnect with God who is here. God who knows you by name, who loves you unconditionally.

Those Who Dream

We stay awake awake to ourselves and to the realities of the world and to the presence of God in our everyday lives **so that** we can dream.

When our eyes are open to the truth of the world - to its beauty and its brokenness - then we begin to feel God's dreams to take root in us - dreams for peace and love and joy... new life...and these dreams become our own...kind of hope-dreams...

This Advent I am hope-dreaming of peace in Israel, Gaza and Ukraine.

Hope-dreaming of a world in which all children are cared for and sleep safely at night, where there is food enough to go around and shelter for everyone.

Hope-dreaming of an Advent season in which the love, joy, peace, patience, kindness and life of God is known for all people in every corner of our earth.

What are your hope-dreams this Advent?

God promises that for all of eternity there will be no more pain, no more tears, no more suffering....

But **sleeper awake** the challenge to us is to bring the hope-dreams of a kinder, more loving, more generous eternity into this world right now...to not just be blasé about yet another Christmas, filled with deadlines, shopping lists and the same old carols playing in shops for months on end...but to allow those God inspired hope-dreams to

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wake us up, to change us – change the way we speak, the way we pray, the way we give, the way we work...

This Advent, may we be awake to the truth that God's ultimate dream has always been to be intimately connected to us. To come as a baby and dwell among us. *Emmanuel* -God with us and fully awake to our humanness.

One of the ancient ways that we can together be awake to God's dream of connection to us, is through Communion.

Invitation to the Table

In a moment we are going to share communion together.

And as we do, I invite you to be *awake* - awake to what these elements represent: the body and blood of Jesus, given for us in the ultimate act of love and sacrifice. It's enough to take our breath away.

So today, you are invited - as you always are - to come to this Table.

Not because of what you have or haven't done.

Not because you've been a "good Christian" or a "good person."

You are invited simply because you belong to God.

And that is enough.

So come to this Table.

Come with your questions, your doubts, your fears.

Come with your hopes, your awe, your love for the world.

Come as you are... fully, honestly, authentically.

For God is here at this Table.

And God is the one who invites you.

Let us pray...

Thank you Jesus that
on the night before you died you
took bread, gave thanks, broke it, and said:

"This is my body, given for you."

Then you took the cup and said:

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***“This cup is the new covenant in my blood
whenever you drink it, remember me.”***

As we share this bread and cup,
May they awaken us to Your dream for the world...
a world healed and whole in your love,
where all are welcome,
and all are fed.

Thank you Jesus for your presence here with us

I pray that this Advent each of us will experience the invitation not just to wake up,
but to *wake up in order to dream*. I pray that we may wake up to the ache of our
broken world **and** the dream that God is not finished yet.

I pray that we wake up again to the presence of Jesus already here, **and** to the
dream of the promise that he will come again.

“Sleeper, awake! Rise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you.”

And so we ask: This Advent wake us up Lord

Wake us up and shine upon us!

May it be so...May it be so...Amen.

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These questions are intended to help you think more about this message. We hope they might enable conversation, encouraging you to wrestle with how God might be challenging us to apply what we have heard/read.

1. **Waking Up to God:** Reflect on the year that has been... In what areas have you grown spiritually “drowsy” in 2025? What might it look like to “wake up” in those places? What are ways you could be more present to God in daily life?
2. **Waking Up to Others:** Who might God be inviting you to notice or pray for this week?
3. **Waking Up to the World:** What part of the world’s pain is hardest to stay awake to? Perhaps you might like to write a prayer of lament about this pain. Have you tried “praying as you scroll”?
4. **Becoming a Hope-Dreamer:** What hope-dreams is God growing in you this Advent? How might these dreams influence how you live out an ordinary day? How might they change how you pray?

If you’d like to chat with someone about your spiritual journey or anything else going on in your life, please contact us at care@windsorpark.org.nz; we’re better together and no perfect people are allowed.

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Below are some further resources that may take the message further and deeper and enable you to explore other viewpoints on the same theme. We also encourage you to engage with the preacher if there are further questions you have or if you'd like clarification on anything. Email info@windsorpark.org.nz and we'll direct your query to the appropriate person.

1. Writing your own **lament** - <https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/dare-to-hope-in-god> explains lament and how to lament
2. Holly quoted a line from “**A Summer Day**” by **Mary Oliver**. You can read the whole poem here: <https://www.stjames-cathedral.org/PoemoftheWeek/oliver-summerday.aspx>
3. We have updated our **Right Now Media** library with recommendations for **Advent** including specific resources for children and families! To check our suggestions or browse the full library click here:
<https://app.rightnowmedia.org/en/library/custom/default>

If you don't already have a Right Now Media account click below to **set up a free account!**

<https://www.windsorpark.org.nz/resources>