

Spoiler Alert!

If you don't want to know the ending please do not keep listening.

"But in those days, after that suffering, the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will be falling from heaven, and the powers in the heavens will be shaken. Then they will see 'the Son of Man coming in clouds' with great power and glory. Then 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...Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.

You'd think that at the beginning of a new church year, the first Sunday in Advent, we'd start with something a little more celebratory.

After all it seems appropriate to start a new season with some sort of celebration, something to mark the moment.

You'd think right?!?

But of course as Christians, as people of the Way, a way that is so different compared to the surrounding culture we shouldn't be surprised that the start of our year isn't a celebration.

We are after all people who start with the cross and then the empty tomb. We start with death and then comes resurrection.

And so the beginning of our new year is no different.

We begin our new year with an image of the end of the world as we know it.

We begin with the end.

What a strange place to start.

There's no warning we just jump right into the ending, the dark moon and falling stars, Jesus coming down to earth in power and all of God's people being gathered together.

It's a picture of heaven and earth passing away but not God's word.

Then we are zoomed back in time to now and are told to keep awake.

What a paradox.

Getting a glimpse of the future and then being asked to live in the present.

How are we supposed to stay awake when we already know the end of the story?

The temptation is to become complacent, even apathetic in the face of a known future.

As human beings the tension of not knowing, of wondering and curiosity keeps us on our toes.

It's the unknown outcome, the unpredictable moments that bring anxiety but also excitement into our lives, that keeps our adrenaline running and our bodies moving.

It's a paradox to know the end but still stay awake.

A lot of the tension and suspense dissipates when you know the end.

On one hand you can relax and simply enjoy moving through the story without anxiety and yet we are called to pay attention.

Not so long ago there was an old man in a little house.

He'd lived there a long time, sometimes so long he felt.

In his 90's the old man is feeling his age.

"I can't go down the stairs into my workshop," he says to himself while sitting in the living room.

"I can't drive," he says to himself while looking out the window.

"I can't go out at night," as the street lamps light streams onto his bed.

"I spend most of my time in this little house," he thinks while looking at the kitchen wall.

The house feels a lot smaller since his wife died ten years ago.

In fact it seems like every year the walls close in on him just a little bit more.

"Why am I still alive? What's the point?"

If he's being honest he really is ready for the end.

Sitting at church that Sunday he looks around the room at all the empty seats.

"There isn't much left for me here," he thinks to himself.

"Why don't you just take me Lord?"

The next day while he's eating his morning porridge the phone rings.

"You have an extra room don't you?" his good friend blurts out.

"Sure," the old man says.

"Well are you willing to put up a young couple? The wife is pregnant and the husband just lost his job at the fish processing plant."

"No definitely not," he says.

"It's only for a few weeks until they find another place."

"No."

"They only need a room to sleep in and a kitchen to make food in."

"I don't know."

"That's good enough for me, I'll come over with them later tomorrow.

Click."

"What just happened?" the old man says to himself.

Before he knows it the couple is living in his son's old bedroom.

It's not a big bedroom but it's enough and they seem overjoyed.

The old man isn't sure what to think of the whole thing.

There are these strangers living in his house.

They say hi in passing and he runs into them in the kitchen but that's about it.

The man is out most of the day searching for work and the woman is usually resting in the room.

"The doctor says you have to be on bed rest," the old man overhears the husband saying as he walks by their door on his way to the bedroom.

"Are these people going to be here forever," the man thinks to himself as he drifts off into a deep sleep.

The next morning he wakes up to clattering in the kitchen.

He slides into his slippers and slowly makes his way down the hallway.

The pleasant smell of French toast fills meets him as he gets closer to the kitchen.

"Good morning," the wife says.

"Good morning," the old man says with a hint of confusion.

"I thought I'd make us breakfast if that's OK," she says sheepishly.

To tired to go back to his room the old man sits down.

The French toast is delicious.

Every morning after that the old man wakes up to clanging dishes and clattering pans and each morning he follows the trail of smells to the kitchen.

Pancakes, bacon, eggs, toast.

“I haven’t eaten this well since...”

“Since when?” she asks.

He looks down at the plate of eggs and keeps eating.

After two months the baby’s born.

“The crying in the middle of the night isn’t as bad as I thought it would be,” he thinks to himself.

Soon the little girl is walking around the house as he watches his afternoon shows.

The husband finds work at a local construction company.

Two months turns into two years.

“Boy the house is much bigger than I remember it,” the old man thinks to himself as he looks around at the four of them sitting at the dinner table.

Lacey, Anthony and even little Tara smile back at him.

“How’s your dinner Gary?”

“Good,” he says, “Very good.”

And what I say to you I say to all: Keep awake.

Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.

Keep awake, my words will not pass away, keep awake, my words will not pass away.

Can you stay awake knowing the end of the story, when you’re getting close to the end of the story?

You may know the end but you aren’t there yet.

You’re still here, so stay awake.

There’s more to come before the end.

In fact we’re just getting started.