

*Dream, Don't Sleep* / Mark 13:24-37 & 2 Peter 3:8-15

They say you will come like a "thief in the night,"  
The hour unclear, the day easily feared.

But I toss these words over the edge of my tongue,  
And they don't taste right.

A thief is one that I lock out.  
A thief is the one that I fear.

So I ask myself—  
Did I downgrade you to no more than a thief, Great Builder?  
Did you form me from the dust,  
Breathe life into my bones,  
And paint the horizon into the sky, all for me?

And was all of that fine,  
Until you asked me to love my neighbor as myself?  
Was all of that fine,  
Until you said, "Dream, don't sleep"?  
Was all of that fine,  
Until you asked me to wake up to the suffering in the streets?

Did I imprison you to the role of the thief  
To keep you from getting too close?

Forgive me, Great Builder.  
Tear down the door to my house.  
Crawl through the window.  
Slip through the attic fan.  
Dance in the security light.  
Scream through the letterbox until I hear you again.  
For this house is your house.  
You built it.  
You belong here.  
I am begging you,  
Break back in.

**Poem by Sarah Are**

*read* Mark 13:24-37

*commentary* / Dr. Marcia Riggs

This Advent season begins amid pandemic and protest. We were not prepared for the dramatic shifts in our ways of living as COVID-19 began its trek across the globe. Many physical bodies have been ravaged and lives taken by this fierce virus. Families, churches, schools, and employees have been scattered from their gathering spaces into physical isolation. Likewise, Black Lives Matter (BLM) protests erupted in cities (nationally and globally) as Black women and men died again at the hands of police violence.

To begin Advent amid pandemic and protest is a befitting point of departure for 21st century people of God. We are being reminded that to be the people of God requires an ethical posture of attentiveness, to "keep awake." (v. 37) The text charges us to "keep awake" because we do not know the day or the hour when the fullness of "God with us" will be realized. To keep awake means we are being charged, in the vernacular of BLM, to be "woke." Being woke means being aware of, enraged by, and willing to protest in solidarity with people who are pushed to the margins of society because of systemic oppression manifest as racism, sexism, heterosexism, ableism, homophobia, transphobia, xenophobia—any and all forms of objectification and dehumanization we enact upon one another.

As we light the Advent candle of hope, we keep awake by dreaming, by envisioning how we will live out God's promise to be with us. We expect God to be with us and meet us on the other side of this pandemic and protest. For the other side of pandemic and protest is not a return to "normal"; it is living the hope of God's continuing revelation of justice. We do not know the day or the hour, but we do know as the African American poet Langston Hughes says:

*Hold fast to dreams  
For if dreams die  
Life is a broken-winged bird  
That cannot fly.<sup>1</sup>*

<sup>1</sup> Langston Hughes. "Dreams." The Collected Works of Langston Hughes. Copyright © 2002 by Langston Hughes. Reprinted by permission of Harold Ober Associates, Inc. [poetryfoundation.org/poems/150995/dreams-5d767850da976](http://poetryfoundation.org/poems/150995/dreams-5d767850da976)

*read* Mark 13:24-37

*from the artist* / Hannah Garrity

This paper lace explores the poetic patterns in this Mark text. Stars fall to the lower part of the frame as a fig tree leafs out in the central circle. The fig tree creates a circular motif reminding us of the tree of life while also representing the sun and the moon in this text. With a celestial flow, lines circulate around the edges of the piece, replicating the pupil of an eye.

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

In the time of COVID and in this season of Advent, we can see, now. We can see that systemic change is not just possible, but immediate. God has tried this before—we have glimmers in history. Can the human collective bring about God's dream for the new heaven and the new earth? I can reach out and touch it. It is possible, immediately. We must choose it.

In one of Oprah Winfrey's masterclasses, the late John Lewis shared how he was shaped by his mentor:<sup>2</sup> "Jim Lawson taught us the whole concept of the Beloved Community, this idea that in the bosom of every human being there is the spark of divinity and it is the spark of something that is sacred, and holy, and special, and that we don't have a right to destroy."<sup>3</sup> The stars in this image depict that divine spark we are born with—that hope, those stars that have fallen from heaven and lodged themselves within each of us. Let us not be found asleep in this moment, this movement. Let us live into our spark. Let us seek it in each person we meet.

### *prayer*

Breathe deeply as you gaze upon the image on the left. Imagine placing yourself in this scene. What do you see? How do you feel? Get quiet and still, offering a silent or spoken prayer to God.

<sup>2</sup> Jim Lawson, b. 1928, is an activist and university professor. He was a leader and theoretician of nonviolence within the American Civil Rights Movement during the 1960's.

<sup>3</sup> Winfrey, Oprah. "Oprah's Master Class, Remembering John Lewis." *Oprah Winfrey Network*. July 19, 2020. [youtube.com/watch?v=tKmanDEy2ZE](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tKmanDEy2ZE).



Spark of Divinity | Hannah Garrity

*read* Psalm 80:1-7, 17-19

*from the artist* / Lisle Gwynn Garrity

Psalms of lament, such as Psalm 80, give us permission to add our voice to the choruses of faithful outcries throughout the ages. They give us permission to be fully honest—with ourselves and with God. They give us permission to proclaim that God is powerful enough to take it—and to respond to our pleas.

Lamenting, therefore, is an act of robust faith. When we cry out to God, we name the disruption, disorientation, and disorder of our lives. We dismantle the myth that we have everything under control. We awaken to our own pain and the suffering of others. We ask God to wake up God's power.

In this image, I drew a visual prayer of lament, grieving some of the many hardships we've collectively faced in 2020. A healthcare worker masks her son as he prepares to go into a precarious learning environment. A church building announces its closure. A crashing stock market creates a chasm through the composition. An eviction notice and a Zoom meeting loom in the background. An obituary hangs near hands testing a COVID-19 vaccine. Tears fall like rain.

While drawing this, I kept adding more and more laments. The page filled, and yet I couldn't fit it all in. As you add color to this scene, I invite you to consider your own grief. Contemplate what images you would include to compose your own visual prayer of lament.

God, wake up your power. Restore us. Let your face shine, so that we might be saved.

*prayer*

In quiet contemplation, color in the page on the left, reflecting on how the imagery illuminates what you find in the scripture and artist's statement. Conclude with a silent or spoken prayer to God.



Restore Us | Lisle Gwynn Garrity



Tear Open the Heavens | Lauren Wright Pittman

*read* Isaiah 64:1-9

*from the artist* / Lauren Wright Pittman

Nothing feels more appropriate to me this year than lament. I began to study this text as I saw police and military presence forcibly end peaceful demonstrations in D.C. With tear gas and rubber bullets raining down, the crowd scattered to make way for a photo op co-opting the Word and house of God.<sup>4</sup>

*"O that you would tear open the heavens and come down."*

Seeing this public display of power felt like I was drifting off into a nightmare. Instead of succumbing to numbness, abdicating responsibility, and pointing a finger at God, we must keep awake. Particularly, we white people have a tremendous amount of work to do. We could curl up in our cushioned privilege and ignore this national reckoning, or we could blaze a new way. We need to stop stammering in self-justification and defense. We need to stop performative acts of allyship and resist centering ourselves.

*"We have all become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous deeds are like a filthy cloth. We all fade like a leaf, and our iniquities take us away."*

We hope that God will not remember our iniquity forever. We plead with God, and hope God's anger may subside. God is raging against our systems alongside those prophetic protesters entreating us to "Step down off the scaffolding of whiteness and join the community of Creation."<sup>5</sup>

In this image, the tears of humanity rise to meet God, as God's tears rain down. God weeps for Creation to be restored, for humanity to be the vessels we were designed to be—vessels of baptismal waters, of peace, of justice, of love. I pray that we allow God's tears to soften and prepare us to be molded into God's dream for Creation.

### *prayer*

Breathe deeply as you gaze upon the image on the left. Imagine placing yourself in this scene. What do you see? How do you feel? Get quiet and still, offering a silent or spoken prayer to God.

<sup>4</sup> The artist refers to an incident that occurred in June of 2020, when President Trump posed with a bible in front of St. John's Church in D.C., using military force to clear protesters from the street.

<sup>5</sup> Sharon Harper, Lisa. "White Women's Toxic Tears with Lisa Sharon Harper." For the Love podcast with Jen Hatmaker. Special Edition Series | Episode 05." [jenhatmaker.com/podcast/special-edition-series/white-womens-toxic-tears-with-lisa-sharon-harper/](https://jenhatmaker.com/podcast/special-edition-series/white-womens-toxic-tears-with-lisa-sharon-harper/)

*journaling our*  
**DREAMS**

If you can remember any of your dreams from this past week, recall any details that come back to you—colors, people, images, fears, interactions, feelings. As you piece together your dreams, are there any patterns or deeper meanings? How might your dreams be showing you something about your life right now?

If you can't remember your dreams, in the space below, write a dream of hope: What's something you hope for yourself, your family, our world, or someone you love?

**TAKE SABBATH,**  
*for dreams take time*

There's a reason dreams come to us in our sleep—rest recharges us, connects us with our intuition, expands our imagination, and opens us to receive God's messages. It takes action to bring our dreams to life; it takes rest and time to sustain them. To nourish and sustain yourself as a dreamer, commit to a Sabbath activity today, perhaps one of those listed below:

- Go for a walk outside.
- Sit quietly and meditate.
- Plant something indoors or outside.
- Spend time with a friend or loved one.
- Explore a new area of your town or city.
- Cook or bake something using a favorite or new recipe.
- Do yoga or exercise in a way that feels good for your body.
- Write and mail a letter to someone you haven't talked to in a while.
- Organize or redesign an area in your home.
- Draw or create something.
- Dance or play music.
- Write a poem or a song.
- Watch a movie.
- Take a nap.
- Read a book.