

**First Congregational
United Church of Christ
River Falls, Wisconsin**

November 30, 2025



Hope

**FIRST CONGREGATIONAL UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST
RIVER FALLS, WISCONSIN**

November 30, 2025

First Sunday of Advent

10:00 am

Gathering

Hope is about being able to see that there is light
despite all the darkness.
- Desmond Tutu

Welcome to our guests who are visiting with us today! - Activity bags are available for children. - Large print bulletins are available. - Visitors please stop at the welcome booth. - Please stand when noted by the * - Congregation responses are in bold. - Please note our worship service is livestreamed.	Our Mission is to Love God and Serve People. Everyone is welcome because everyone matters.
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GATHERING MUSIC

WELCOME AND RINGING OF THE BELL

CALL TO WORSHIP

L: Today, we begin the journey of Advent.

P: **Let us pray that we may be ready and able to welcome the Christ child into our lives again.**

L: May the keeping of Advent be upon our hearts and lives.

P: **Come, Lord Jesus!**

L: May this Advent wreath remind us to prepare for Christ's coming.

P: **Come, Lord Jesus!**

L: The first candle is the candle of HOPE. It was hope that gave people the courage to go on, and it was hope that directed their prayers toward a Messiah.

P: **Because of our trust in what God has already done for us, we are bold to hope for what God will yet do with us.**

(Light the first Advent candle)

L: "The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light."

P: **Jesus said, "I am the light of the world." May our light so shine before others that they will give glory to God!**

All: **Come, let us worship the God who leads us into life!**

***PRAYER OF CONFESSION**

L: Gracious God, we know we ought to be watching for signs of your presence and of your Son's coming.

P: **But we are so easily distracted by what is none of our business, like Peter worrying about the Master's love for John;**

L: Or even by what is our business, like Martha cooking up a storm in her kitchen;

P: **Or by sheer fatigue, like the disciples in Gethsemane.**

L: Forgive our distraction, most patient Lord,

P: **And let this Advent season find us alert to your presence,**

L: And eagerly looking forward to the coming of your Son,

P: **Both at Christmas and at the end of time. Amen.**

***ASSURANCE OF FORGIVENESS**

L: Hear the Good News! The Messiah comes to bring good news to the oppressed, to bind up the brokenhearted and proclaim liberty to the captives.

P: **This is Good News!**

L: The Messiah comes to give strength to the weary, hope to the hopeless and peace to those living in stress.

P: **This is Good News!**

L: In Advent we make way for Jesus who comes in the form of a little bitty baby to save us from our sins.

P: **This is Good News!**

P: **Let us spread the Good News wherever God has placed us. Amen.**

L: May the peace of the Lord be with you all.

P: **And also with you.**

***PASSING OF THE PEACE**

(Please greet one another with signs of peace)

***GLORIA (sung twice)**

He Came Down

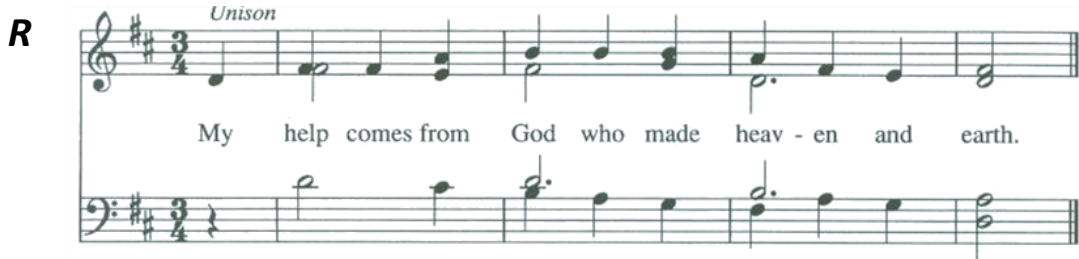
He came down that we may have hope;

He came down that we may have hope;

Hallelujah forevermore.

Hearing the Word

PSALM 121 (Cantor will introduce; congregation, please join on refrain)



- L: I lift up my eyes to the hills – from where will my help come?
P: **My help comes from the Lord, who made heaven and earth.**
L: God will not let your foot be moved; God who keeps you will not slumber.
P: **God who keeps Israel will neither slumber nor sleep.**
L: The Lord is your keeper; the Lord is your shade at your right hand.
P: **The sun shall not strike you by day, nor the moon by night.**
L: The Lord will keep you from all evil; God will keep your life.
P: **The Lord will keep your going out and your coming in from this time on and forevermore. R**

Celebrating the Meal

All Christians are welcome at the Lord's table. The bread is gluten-free. The cup is alcohol-free.
Those choosing not to commune may receive a blessing from the servers.

The Invitation to the Meal

- L: Brothers and sisters in Christ, as we wait and watch during this Advent season, we pray...
P: **Come, O Come, Emmanuel, come and save us.**
L: As we transition from a season of giving thanks to a time of preparing for the Messiah's birth, we pray...
P: **Come, O Come, Emmanuel, come and save us.**
L: As we look for signs of his presence among us yet again, we pray...
P: **Come, O Come, Emmanuel, come and save us.**
All: **So come let us gather at the table of our Lord.**

The Great Thanksgiving

- L: The Lord be with you.
P: **And also with you.**
L: Lift up your hearts.
P: **We lift them up to the Lord.**
L: Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.
P: **It is right to give our thanks and praise.**
L: It is right and good always and everywhere to give thanks...

The Words of Institution

L: We praise your name as we proclaim the mystery of faith...

All: Christ has died. Christ is risen. Christ will come again.

Prayer of Consecration

Distribution of the Elements

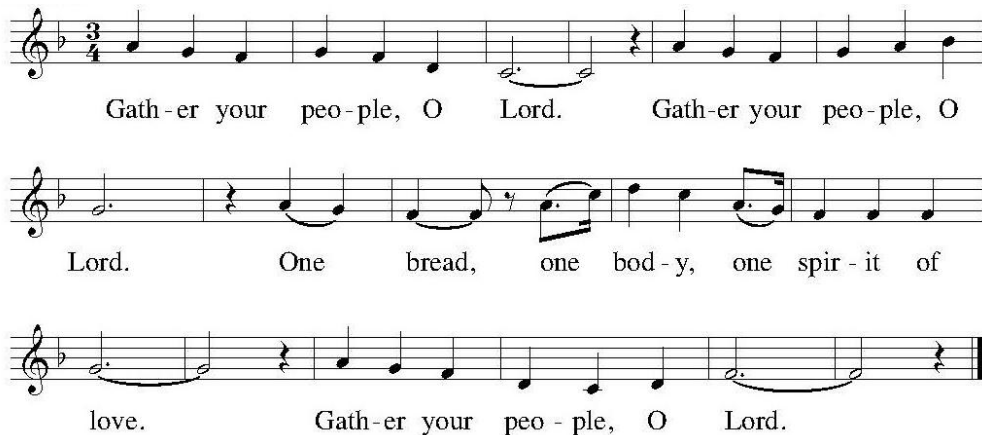
Hymns during the distribution of the elements:

We Gather Together

Blue #81

Gather Your People, O Lord

Congregation join on refrain:



Let Us Break Bread Together

Blue #699

Come and Fill Our Hearts

Come and fill our hearts with your peace. You alone, O Lord, are holy.

Come and fill our hearts with your peace, alleluia!

Prayer of Thanksgiving

All: We give you thanks, Almighty God, that you have refreshed us at your table by granting us the presence of Jesus Christ. Strengthen our faith, increase our love for one another, and send us forth into the world in courage and peace, rejoicing in the power of the Holy Spirit; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Proclaiming the Word

TIME WITH CHILDREN

Rev. Chris Myers

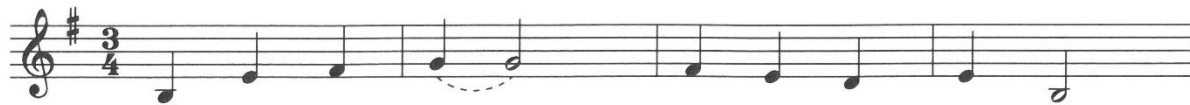
SONG (Children preschool through grade 8 leave for Sunday School.)

Stay awake (clap, clap). Be ready (stomp, stomp).

You do not know the hour when the Lord is coming.

Stay awake (clap, clap). Be ready (stomp, stomp). The Lord is coming soon.

*HYMN

Christ, Be Our Light

1. Long - ing for light, we wait in dark - ness.
 2. Long - ing for peace, our world is trou - bled.
 3. Long - ing for food, man - y are hun - gry.
 4. Long - ing for shel - ter, man - y are home - less.
 5. Man - y the gifts, man - y the peo - ple,



Long - ing for truth, we turn to you.
 Long - ing for hope, man - y de - spair.
 Long - ing for wa - ter, man - y still thirst.
 Long - ing for warmth, man - y are cold.
 man - y the hearts that yearn to be - long.



Make us your own, your ho - ly peo - ple,
 Your word a - lone has pow'r to save us.
 Make us your bread, bro - ken for oth - ers,
 Make us your build - ing, shel - ter - ing oth - ers,
 Let us be ser - vants to one an - oth - er,



light for the world to see.
 Make us your liv - ing voice.
 shared un - til all are fed.
 walls made of liv - ing stone.
 mak - ing your king - dom come.



Christ, be our light! Shine in our hearts.



Shine through the dark - ness. Christ, be our light!



Shine in your church gath - ered to - day.

***STATEMENT OF FAITH for Advent**

L: In quietness and darkness, in peace and confusion, Jesus Christ wants to make his home and meet his friends. He is the light of life:

P: **He is the hope for the world.**

L: In him there is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither Roman Catholic nor Protestant;

P: **All are one in Jesus Christ.**

L: He is the light of life:

P: **He is the hope of the world.**

L: In him there is neither black nor white, neither north nor south;

P: **All are one in Jesus Christ.**

L: He is the light of life:

P: **He is the hope of the world.**

L: In him there is neither male nor female, neither master nor servant;

P: **All are one in Jesus Christ.**

L: He is the light of life:

P: **He is the hope of the world.**

L: He is the light of life:

P: **He is the hope of the world. Amen.**

THE PRAYERS & LORD'S PRAYER (debts/debtors)

Lord in your mercy... **Hear our prayer.**

...Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name, thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread and forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors. Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.

GATHERING OUR GIFTS

Song of Mary

Emma Cruciani

Arr. by Mark Hayes

OFFERTORY (sung twice) *Prepare the Way of the Lord

***Prepare the way of the Lord. Prepare the way of the Lord,
and all people will see the salvation of our God.***

***PRAYER OF THANKSGIVING**

Holy God, open our eyes and ears. Revive the desert places in us that we may yet blossom. Don't let the world be cold. Don't let the world be dry. But bring your promises close to it. Freshen it. And let us stand on tiptoes of expectation, daily through Advent, convinced that we will find your footprints on our paths, and that one day soon we will see these gifts blossom as flowers in the desert. Amen.

Sending

***HYMN**

People Look East

Blue #161

***BLESSING**

POSTLUDE

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SUNDAY PARTICIPANTS

Preacher: Chris Myers
Celebrant: Stacy Johnson Myers
Cantor: Emma Cruciani
Liturgist: Jean Smith
Deacons: Brian Miller, Loral Keil,
Liz Swank, Jena Most,
Becky Pajac
Organist: Marsha Pearson
Nursery: Kahla Fuller
Live Stream: Jeff Hoffman
Welcomers: Lu Lueck, JoAnne Friedell
Trustee: Rick Price
Coffee
Fellowship: Carole Mottaz, Jill Paulson
Counters: Marie Roe, Dennis Linder
*Altar table flowers are given by Brian Miller
and Loral Keil in celebration of their 44th
wedding anniversary.*

CHURCH STAFF

Pastor: Christopher Myers
Education Pastor: Stacy Johnson Myers
Youth Minister: Alex Plum
Music Coordinator &
Bell Director: Jamie Mills
Choir Director: Sarah Plum
Organists: Terry Mithun,
Marsha Pearson
Building Manager: Timothy Bylander
Church Moderator: Marie Roe
Office Administrator: Missy Luedtke
Nursery Attendant: Kahla Fuller
Custodians: Farnum Fuller,
Troy Zakrzewski

Treasurer's Report

	<u>Nov 23, 2025</u>	<u>Year to Date</u>
General Fund Income*	\$ 11,446	\$ 501,026
General Fund Operational Needs	\$ 10,623	\$ 499,281

A full accounting of all income and expenses is available in the church office.

*Includes annual and monthly gifts.



Offering QR Code

1. On your mobile device, open your Camera app or QR Code app
2. Point your camera at the QR Code
3. Click the tab 'Give Online'

Please remember the following in your prayers this week:

Those who are ill or recovering:

Barbara de Souza, Jeff Auchampach (nephew of Yvonne Benson), Glen Corliss (brother of Raelle Jorae), Amy (friend of Barb and Larry Peterson), Tom (friend of Barb Stephens), Eric (friend of Liz Swank), Robert Ostendorf, JoAnn Lentz, Don Larson, Jim Filkins, Rhonda Klink, Elaine (friend of Janice Healy)

Prayers for the ministry of our congregation:

- For those who will receive Amaryllis bulbs and Giving Tree gifts, may they bring God's love closer to all who give and receive them
- For those participating in the Advent Event next Sunday after church, may it be a fun and faith-filled day
- For those baking cookies to trade and share at next week's cookie exchange, may it kindle joy for all
- For those who joined the church as members Sunday, November 16th, may they discover faithful and joyful ways to find their place in their new church home
- For our congregation as we dedicate our 2026 financial pledges, may generosity power our ministry
- For the new Among Friends director Brittany Myer who started on Tuesday, may she lead with grace and be welcomed with joy
- For Louise Schmahl (sister of Becky Pajac) as she continues dialysis

Prayers for our World:

- For those traveling over the Thanksgiving holiday, may you have uneventful trips there and back
- For food pantries dealing with so much demand, may communities generously support them and the people they serve
- For a safe and fruitful deer hunting season
- For the tentative peace in Gaza, may it lead to a just and lasting peace
- For the people of Ukraine as they battle for their freedom, may they be given strength and courage
- For all of us as we work to better care for the gift of God's good creation and reduce the effects of climate change
- For those living with dementia and families trying to care for them, may they all be given strength, grace and help along the way

Prayers of Thanksgiving:

- For the return of our Advent Evening Prayer worship services Wednesday, December 3, 10 and 17, may they kindle hope and joy with Advent season
- For time to simply stop, gather with family and friends and eat
- For the return of the Reverse Advent Calendar, a time to give instead of receive during Advent, may God's people be fed
- For Loral Keil and Brian Miller celebrating their 44th wedding anniversary, may you continue to grow in love
- For 10 years of generating clean solar energy with our church solar panels, thanks be to God!
- For our church musicians who each week bring their gifts to grace our worship service, thank you!

For those grieving the loss of loved ones:

- For those who mourn, especially the families of Steve Hove, Tom Hall, Hing Man, Kent Tomlinson, Marjorie Faulks, Chuck White, Marc Otto, may they be strengthened at this difficult time

If you have people you wish to include on our prayer list, please contact the church office or one of the pastors.

Announcements

Loving God

New to Church: Are you a first-time visitor? Please stop at the welcome table in the gathering area to receive a special welcome gift from us!

Update from the Personnel Committee: The part-time Minister for Community position remains open. There are a limited number of potential qualified candidates for a position like this. The committee has initiated a broader search & increased our focus on this hire. There are a couple candidates who have expressed interest that we are considering. The committee continues to solicit more applications. If you know of anyone who could be a good fit for this position—or know someone who might know someone—please have them contact Pastor Chris or Alan Tuchtenhagen, Chair of the Personnel Committee at: alantuchtenhagen@gmail.com

Sunday Morning Bible Study: Please join us on Sunday mornings to discuss the Bible passages used in worship. The group meets from **9:00–9:50** in the Youth Room. For more information, contact Pastor Stacy.

Wednesday Afternoon Bible Study: The group is studying the Gospel of John. Copies of the discussion book are available for \$20.00 in the church office. If you have questions, contact Pastor Stacy.

2026 Financial Pledges: If you did not return yours, please do so today. We need all of our church families and friends to make a financial commitment to support and fund the mission & ministry of the church. These pledges pay for our programs and buildings, mission and staff. Please return your pledge in the offering plate or the church office. Thank you.

Advent Evening Prayer: Each Wednesday in Advent, we gather for worship using the Holden Evening Prayer Service of simple songs, scripture and stories. Join us on **Wed, Dec 8, 10 & 17 at 6:30 pm** in the sanctuary for the absolutely lovely thirty-minute worship service. Youth Groups, Confirmation & Interns, will all start in worship and then move to class afterward.

Christmas Eve Worship: We will again offer our 4:00 pm Christmas Eve family worship with candlelight, communion and a story for children of all ages. The late service will be at 10:00 pm. It will again include the choir, communion and candlelight. It is beautiful, and it is not as full as the 4:00 pm family service. Please join us and consider inviting a friend to join you.

Loving Neighbor

Reverse Advent Calendars: “Reverse” reminds us Advent is a season of giving. Rather than getting candy each day, we will add a food item to the grocery bag. Each bag has a list of suggested donations, but you can add whatever you want. The Mission Ed Committee will bring the bags to the Food Pantry at the end of December. Thank you!

Sharing Families Giving Tree: If you would like to help some children have a better Christmas this year, please select an ornament from the tree and purchase a gift from their wish list. **The unwrapped gift with the ornament needs to be at the church no later than noon Thurs, Dec 11.** Please give the gift cards to the church office. If you would like to make a cash donation, please make out to First Congregational Church with “Sharing Families” in the memo line. Thank you for your generosity. If you have questions, please contact Diane Welsh (651-334-3128 or 715-386-6620).

Christmas Shoebox: The drive for donations for Christmas Shoebox items for the gentlemen at Kinnic Falls Alcohol & Drug Abuse Services has begun. If you would rather donate cash, just designate it for the Christmas Shoebox. **Donations are due by Dec 11.** The list of items needed is on the gathering table.

Bring Christmas Joy! Each year we invite members of the church family to deliver an amaryllis plant to one of our shut-ins or special church friends. This is a wonderful, family-friendly activity that brings joy to both the giver & recipient. Simply sign up at church, prepare the amaryllis plant, and deliver it. Feel free to add some cookies if you wish.

The Christmas Fund: The Christmas Fund has been caring for active & retired clergy & lay employees of the United Church of Christ for over 100 years, providing emergency grants, supplementation of small annuities & health premiums, and Christmas “Thank You” gifts to our lower income retirees. This year, your care & compassion will be especially appreciated by those servants of the church who are facing a time of need. The envelopes are on the gathering table.

Basics for Local Kids: Volunteers are needed. You can help families shop or you can help sort, restock or organize winter wear. Shifts are usually 2 hours. To sign up for a day and time that works for you, go to <https://www.basicsforlocalkids.org/> or call Kim at 715-821-1623. Contact Renee Whipple at 715-307-5074 if you have any questions.

Simpson Shelter Supply Needs: Women’s white crew socks, men’s white crew socks, men’s t-shirts sizes S, M, L, XL, XXL, XXXL, personal size shampoo, personal size conditioner, personal size body lotion, rain ponchos, eye masks, umbrellas, washcloths, padlocks, good buys on out-of-season clothing. All items MUST BE NEW. There is a box for donations.

Empty Pill Bottles (Prescription Only): The River Falls Lions Club is collecting empty pill bottles, only the clear prescription bottles that are filled by our pharmacists, to send to Africa where there is an urgent need. The bottles will be washed, and the labels soaked off before they are shipped. A tub is in the gathering area.

Among Friends is a community-based social respite program serving adults who have memory loss who reside in Pierce & St. Croix Counties. For more information, call (715) 293-2561. Check out the website: amongfriendsrf.com & Facebook. It is held at church **Tuesdays & Thursdays 9am to 3pm.**

Loving Self

Merry Widows: They will meet on **Wed, Dec 17 at 1:00 pm at West Wind in River Falls.** All widows are welcome to join us for dinner and conversation! See JoAnn Lentz for more information.

Men's Group: Our church men's group meets **every other Tuesday from 9:00-10:00 am** in the Youth Room. All men are welcome to join us for coffee, donuts & lively conversation. Our next meetings are **Dec 2 & 16.**

Women's Group: Interested in fellowship & community with other women? You are invited to join the group at noon every 2nd & 4th Tuesday. Please bring a lunch. The next meetings will be **Dec 9 & 23.**

Church Yoga: The church yoga group meets on **Tuesdays and Thursdays** in the church Fellowship Hall from **9:00-10:00 am** and via Zoom. Please contact the church office to receive the Zoom link.

Let's Knit/Craft Together: Join us on **Thursdays at 10:00 am. We meet at Sycamore on the first Thursday of each month & the Fellowship Hall the other Thursdays.** We have a great time sharing our projects & enjoying each other's company. For more info, contact Marie Roe at 715-781-2103 or firstroe@gmail.com

WISE Team: NAMI (National Alliance on Mental Illness) Family Support Group meets the 2nd & 4th Thursdays 6:30pm at 113 East Elm St & Peer Support Group meets the same evenings at Luther Memorial Church at 6:30pm. The WISE Team meets the first Tuesday of the month at 6:30 pm. For more info, call Marg Downing 715-307-5905.

Community Life

Wednesday Meals: On Wednesday nights, we offer a home-cooked meal in the Fellowship Hall. The cost is \$9 per person with a family max of \$30. **Meals are served from 5:15 to 6:00 pm.** You can get your meal to go if you go through the line (indicate when you sign up). **Reservations must be placed by noon on Tuesdays.** Please sign up at church or online. Menu for Dec 3 is lasagna and chicken alfredo, salad, garlic toast.

Poinsettias for Christmas Eve: Poinsettia sales in honor or memory of someone special have begun. The order forms are on the table. The cost is \$15.00 each. Please return the order form with payment by **Dec 14.** The plants will be on display for the Christmas Eve services. You may pick your plants up after the 10pm service. Proceeds go toward youth activities.

Cookie Exchange: The WISE team has a Cookie Exchange planned for **Sunday, December 7** in the Fellowship Hall following service. Please bring four dozen cookies. Place six cookies in a baggie or clear container, labeling it with the cookie type and recipe. You will go home with eight different types of cookies. Please sign up at church.

Annual Christmas Luncheon: You are invited to attend a Christmas Luncheon on **Tues, Dec 9, at 12:00 noon.** The menu features Norwegian meatballs and a large collection of Christmas cookies. Please come! The cost is \$10.00 per person. Please make a reservation by calling the church office, at church or online.

The Advent Workshop: The Advent Workshop for families will be in the Fellowship Hall following Sunday School on **Dec 7,** the Second Sunday in Advent. The event includes making a variety of Christmas ornaments. If you have friends or neighbors considering participation in a church family, invite them to join you! Please sign up.

Name Tags: We encourage you to wear your name tags so that new people and some not so new, can call you by name. It would also help the deacons when you take communion. If you do not have one, please let Missy in the church office know at missy@firstchurchrf.org. In appreciation, the Welcoming Committee.

Youth Events

Children's Advent Musical: Sunday School children in pre-school through grade 5 have begun rehearsing the 2025 Advent Musical during Sunday School. The dress rehearsal will be on Saturday, December 20, 10:00–12:00 noon. The musical will be presented during worship on Sunday, December 21. It is important for all children to regularly attend Sunday School and be present for these rehearsals.

SCRIPTURE LESSON: Isaiah 2:1-5

The word that Isaiah son of Amoz saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem.

In days to come

the mountain of the LORD's house
shall be established as the highest of the mountains,
and shall be raised above the hills;
all the nations shall stream to it.

Many peoples shall come and say,
'Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD,
to the house of the God of Jacob;
that he may teach us his ways
and that we may walk in his paths.'

For out of Zion shall go forth instruction,
and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem.

He shall judge between the nations,
and shall arbitrate for many peoples;
they shall beat their swords into ploughshares,
and their spears into pruning-hooks;
nation shall not lift up sword against nation,
neither shall they learn war any more.

O house of Jacob,
come, let us walk
in the light of the LORD!

GOSPEL LESSON: Matthew 24:36-44

'But about that day and hour no one knows, neither the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. For as the days of Noah were, so will be the coming of the Son of Man. For as in those days before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day Noah entered the ark, and they knew nothing until the flood came and swept them all away, so too will be the coming of the Son of Man. Then 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. Keep awake therefore, for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming. But understand this: if the owner of the house had known in what part of the night the thief was coming, he would have stayed awake and would not have let his house be broken into. Therefore you also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an unexpected hour.