I. So what we have in the scripture today is a case of Chicken Little meets the boy who cried wolf.

A. Chicken Little of course ran around trying to tell everyone that the sky is falling, the sky is falling, the sky is falling. Which, if you recall the story, ends with her getting all her friends killed.

B. Now the boy who cried wolf, as we know cried out that the wolf was attacking the sheep when it really wasn’t. The villagers would run up to save the sheep only to find the boy laughing. He lied so many times that when the wolf did come to eat the sheep and he cried wolf, well nobody believed him and nobody came to help.

C. Well, for the past 2000 years every generation has cried wolf, that is that the sky is falling; or more precisely that the end of the world is coming.
D. It has been cried out so many times that anybody with any rational capacities has learned to ignore it; just as the villagers came to ignore the boy crying wolf.

E. Of course, the other lesson to be learned from Aesop’s tale is that eventually the wolf did come and nobody was ready for it.

F. But when it comes to Jesus warning, well maybe it’s not so much a warning as it is an invitation. Still the question remains – will you be ready.

II. So let’s stop for a second and realize that if we’re going to be literal about this – well, it didn’t happen.

A. That prediction of Jesus-- it all should have happened before the arrival of the 2nd century C.E. -- but it didn’t.

B. So why do we keep reading this passage as if it has something for us today?
C. Because. Because it is filled with wisdom.

III. First of all, it tells us to be attentive and don’t miss it when the opportunity comes.

A. Jesus told another parable about being ready for a big party and some people just not being ready.

B. In fact, the big party is exactly the metaphor he uses; it’s a big wedding party and some of the brides maids aren’t paying attention and they haven’t gotten ready yet when the groom pulls up and so the wedding and the party go on without them and they’re not included.

C. So the first bit of wisdom we get is to get ready and stay ready, stay awake and be attentive for when the opportunity arrives to welcome in and assist in the creation of God’s Beloved Community.

IV. The second bit of wisdom we glean from this passage is that it is an invitation – not a warning – other than a warning to be ready.
A. It’s not a warning, however, about the sky falling and the end of the world.

B. What it is -- is an invitation to the Kingdom of God.
   1. This is like a “get ready for the big party” kind of invitation.
   2. This is like ‘getting ready for Christmas’ kind of invitation.

C. So what do we do to get ready for Christmas?
   1. Well, of course put up all the decorations, getting the tree and decorating it.
   2. But as a child there was also the Sears and Montgomery Ward’s catalogs that we would study with all the seriousness of the NSA searching Edward Snowden’s emails. We would then make long lists of exactly the toys we wanted.
   3. Today I suppose there is still the Toys R Us catalogs, but for the real list makers we’ve got Amazon and the Christmas lists we can make there are huge.
4. So I think that is what Jesus is doing in this passage, he’s telling us it’s time to get ready and start making our wish list.

5. Sure, he’s also telling us that we need to "Be on guard so that your hearts are not weighed down with overindulgence and drunkenness and the worries of this life, and that day catch you unexpectedly, like a trap."

a) But that warning I’m sure isn’t meant for any of us.

b) Who among us would overindulge in buying stuff we don’t need, and eating and drinking too much and then worrying about how we’re going to pay for it monetarily and with all the weight we will gain.

c) Certainly, he’s not talking about any of us. Well, maybe a few of us. OK, maybe a lot of us.

6. But – he really isn’t talking to us, because we are overindulging because we partying down and **celebrating** and that’s not what Jesus is talking about here.
7. Jesus is warning people not to get so depressed with the thought of the end that they participate in a slow and painful suicide.

8. But we do kind of need to heed Jesus call and not forget that we need to be at attention and be getting ready. We can’t be partying so hard that we forget why we’re partying and forget to do what we need to do to get ready.

V. So let’s get back to the part about getting ready where we find ourselves making that long list; but it’s not a long list of clothes and electronics and fruitcakes and Bronco memorabilia and...well that list can get embarrassingly long; no that’s not the list we’re talking about. The list to which I refer is a list of what we want to see in the new world that God is announcing with this invitation. It’s a wish list but it is also a list of the things that we need to do.
A. Now originally at this point I was going to have a little congregational participation and have us make a list of what we wanted and another list of what we needed to do, but then I came upon this other list from the prophet Zechariah that I found quite sufficient.

[Zechariah 8:1-17]

B. Zechariah is speaking the word of God to the people of Jerusalem as they returned to Jerusalem from their captivity in Babylon and they were beginning to rebuild the city and the temple. So let’s hear the list.

1. It starts out –
   “Thus says the LORD of hosts:
   Old men and old women shall again sit in the streets of Jerusalem, each with staff in hand because of their great age.
   And the streets of the city shall be full of boys and girls playing.”

What a nice world that sounds like but such a wish list requires the fulfillment of a lot of other wishes. Some other things have to happen first.
a) To begin with, for men and women to get old there has to be good health, good health care and sufficient food and shelter.

b) They must be at peace for them to have grown old and not been killed in war or from crime.

c) There is something else important here and quite ahead of its time and that is the inclusivity.

(1) Both men and women are included.

(2) Both men and women carry the staff – a symbol of respect and wisdom.

(3) In the real world, only men were allowed to gather in the streets and hold council, but in this vision both men and women have respect and power and the right to hold the staff.

d) And then we turn to the kids playing in the street; an image that requires safety and security.

(1) For this to happen it would mean an end of terror and hatred and the fear of the boogeyman seeking to hurt them.
(2) But let’s also note that they aren’t indoors staring at a screen playing video games or watching ‘reality TV’ but out in the streets playing being social and enjoying God’s creation.

2. Next the LORD of hosts proposes that there “shall be a sowing of peace; the vine shall yield its fruit, the ground shall give its produce, and the skies shall give their moist dew; and I will cause the remnant of this people to possess all these things.” Again, these few words imply a lot of things.

   a) The vision here is of a peaceful world where all God’s children share in the abundance of the land and no one goes wanting or needing.

   b) This requires that people quite killing and oppressing each other and quite using other human as tools and objects.

   c) But it also means that we have learned to care for the garden, care for God’s creation in a way that is sustainable and creative.
C. Then comes the list of the things that we need to do to get ready as the Holy One on the mouth of the prophet Zechariah continues to speak --

“These are the things that you shall do: Speak the truth to one another, render in your gates judgments that are true and make for peace, do not devise evil in your hearts against one another, and love no false oath; for all these are things that I hate says the LORD.”

Once again these few words speak to so many things that we need to do.

1. To start with, individuals, corporations and governments would no longer deceive, manipulate and lie for their own self benefit.

2. It means they also will do what will make for peace –that is what is good for all and not just themselves.

3. It means the courts would rule on behalf of all the people and not just for the benefit of an oligarchy or plutocracy.
4. Yet, it would seem that the number one thing we need to do -- is to see reality as it is and not through fanciful virtual reality glasses of religion or ideology and we need to be truthful; not the truth that will necessarily benefit us, but the truth that comes from Love.

VI. Yes, what a wonderful world it would be. So let’s get to work preparing for Christmas. We’ve got a lot to do. What are you doing still sitting here? Let’s sing the last hymn and get busy! AMEN.