

# **Christ Is Coming Again**

**Isaiah 2: 1 – 5**

**Matthew 24: 36 – 44**

**Preached by Dr. Cahill**

**Babcock Presbyterian Church**

**Sunday, November 27, 2016**

“But about that day and hour no one knows, neither the angels of heaven, nor the son, but only the father...Therefore you must be ready, for the son of man is coming at an unexpected hour.”

Two thousand years ago, Jesus promised his disciples he would come again to complete God’s plan to bring salvation to the world. This promise to Christians is just as important as Isaiah’s prophecy of the Messiah to the Jews almost six hundred years earlier.

Like the Jews waiting six hundred years before Christ was born, we Christians find ourselves in a similar holding pattern. Ironically, we hold something else in common. Like them, we say, “in God we trust,” but when the chips are down we usually fold. We hedge our bets and try to design systems not always in sync with God’s will.

Notice I said when our trust in God wavers we hedge our bets by building systems designed to protect ourselves. Isn’t that what the Pharisees did? They tried to set up safe spaces to separate themselves from the people and things threatening their way of life. Time and again Jesus tried to show them the error of their ways. Not wanting to hear it, the Pharisees put all their fury into rebuffing Jesus, never considering the possibility that Jesus was right when he said their ways were not necessarily God’s ways.

According to the church calendar, this is the first Sunday of the Advent and the start of the new year. The word Advent comes from the Latin word *adventus*, which simply means “coming.”

As originally conceived, Advent was not about getting ready for Christmas Day but about getting ready for the Christ’s coming.

One of the earliest Christian liturgies declares, “Christ has died, Christ is risen, Christ will come again.” This formula reminds us Christ’s first and second comings aren’t isolated one time events. To the contrary, every minute of every day Christ steps through the veil of eternity into our time and place.

One of the themes of Advent is to awareness. Establish a pattern of awareness so when Christ does appear incognito in the most unlikely person or situation, you’ll be ready for him.

Live today as if it’s your last day, not just eating and drinking and making merry, but also by looking for Christ in every person you meet and every situation you encounter. Be alert because Christ will come to you in ways you’ll never expect.

As we begin the season, let's remind each other not to confuse arriving on time in Bethlehem with the mad dash to December the 25<sup>th</sup>. With December being the busiest month of the year, it's easy getting sidetracked from prayerful meditation and then being diverted into chaotic hyperactivity. Like a black hole, the mad dash to December the 25<sup>th</sup> can suck the life out of us.

To avoid that pitfall, the Old and New Testament assigned readings for this Sunday recommend mindful preparation. In Isaiah we read,

“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.” (Isaiah 2:3)

The mountain of the Lord and the House of the God of Jacob refers to the Temple Mount where Solomon's temple was built almost three thousand years ago. The Jews revered the temple, believing it was God's chosen dwelling place on earth. Just hours before his death, Jesus said to his disciples, the hour was coming when the temple would be torn down but in three days it would be raised again.

At the time the disciples didn't realize Jesus was saying, but after the resurrection, they realized Jesus was actually talking about himself. From then on, “Let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob,” has been reinterpreted. Christ is God's house and by dwelling in Christ we learn, “his ways so we may walk in his paths.”

Not to walk in his paths leads to a bad end. Jesus warned, “...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.”

These unfortunate people weren't swept away just because they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage. These are all necessary things. They were swept away by what they didn't do: getting prepared for God coming to save them from self destruction.

Jesus message is clear. Learn this lesson from the past. By walking in his paths in the present, you are preparing for his coming in the future.

Christ comes into the world in all three tenses: past, present and future. Christ's first coming changed everything. His death on the cross liberated us from the power of sin and his resurrection conquered the power of death. When the time comes, his second coming in glory will tie up all the loose ends by permanently bringing God's kingdom to earth.

Since we live in between Christ's first and second comings, it may seem his coming in the present tense is not as spectacular as his birth announcement from the heavenly choir or even

his promised glorious second coming in the clouds. It may seem that way but it's just as important and necessary.

During the in between times we live in, Jesus comes undercover and in disguise every day, anointing us to be his agents of grace. He comes to us in people and situations we may want to avoid so we can continue what he started two thousand years ago. All the more reason for us to be aware and not snub his presence because we think it's beneath us. We need to be aware so we can receive his anointing to strengthen us because sometimes being an agent of grace is hard and costly.

It's helpful to remember Jesus was in between Palm Sunday and Good Friday when he talked about his second coming. Knowing the time of his passion was near, Jesus must have had a sense of urgency in his voice. The kingdom of God was at hand, but the world's stiffening resistance made his future unpredictable and dangerous.

That should tell us something about us and the way we face adversity. Especially when the world's stiffening resistance to God's will can make our own futures unpredictable and dangerous, we need to be prepared to yield even more of ourselves to Christ so we can carry out our mission as disciples.

In today's assigned reading from Romans, Paul wrote, "...you know what time it is... now is the moment... to wake from your sleep, for salvation is nearer to us now than when we became believers; the night is far gone, the day is near. Let us therefore lay aside the works of darkness and put on the armor of light; let us live honorably as in the day, not in revelry and drunkenness...not in quarreling and jealousy. Instead, put on the Lord Jesus Christ and make no provisions for the flesh to gratify its desires." (Romans 13: 11-14)

The apostle advocated repentance. That means turning away from any desire of the flesh, including selfishness, greed, prejudice and pride contradicting God's will. But Paul also added something hopeful: "(our) salvation is nearer to us now than when we became believers; the night is far gone, the day is near."

Think about it. Every day brings you and me one day closer to experiencing the fullness of the salvation Christ won for us on the cross. In the old Anglican prayer book we find the prayer, "May my last hour be my finest hour." In other words, at the last may I be ready and willing to completely yield myself up to God.

We don't know when that hour will be. Likewise, we don't know when Christ will come again. Jesus said, "But about that hour or day no one knows, neither the angels in heaven, nor the son, but only the Father."

And that, I believe is a good thing. We don't need to know "when" because God already knows and that's all that matters... Shouldn't that satisfy our curiosity? All that's expected from us is doing what God requires. Knowing what God requires and nothing more, has a way of calming us down so we can get on with living and serving in Christ name.

“Be of good cheer,” he said, “I have overcome the world.”

God never spills the beans about the future for good reason. God wants us to learn to trust in God’s timing, and then admit we don’t have to know because that’s God’s job. Only God knows the right time for everything that matters and that’s all that matters.

In the meantime, while we wait for whatever happens, it’s always the right time to do the right thing. Doing the right thing means taking the spotlight off yourself and letting your light shine on others. Loving the unlovable, being determined to be a healing presence, standing up for justice and being a peacemaker is doing the right thing. Having compassion for the weak, making sacrifices for the poor and being brave enough to speak the truth is doing the right thing.

That’s how to make every day count as we waiting and prepare for the inevitable, the coming of Christ and his kingdom.

In defiance of the days growing shorter and the darkness taking over, we light the Advent wreath’s candles. Lighting a candle reminds us the true light has come into the world and the darkness cannot overcome it.

As the world turns dark and cold, there’s no better time to rediscover joy, hope, everlasting life. Let our Advent journey begin as we make our way to Bethlehem and wait for his calming.