

November 30-December 1, 2019 – 1st Sunday in Advent

Text: Romans 13:11-14 and Matthew 24:36-44

You Can't Time the Market on Jesus' Coming

“Keep awake therefore, for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming.”¹¹ Besides this, you know what time it is, how it is now the moment for you to wake from sleep.”

These are both words from Jesus and the Apostle Paul telling the disciples and early Christians to wake up.

Were they sleeping? Metaphorically yes.

They were missing the boat on what it means to faithfully live and wait for Jesus to come again. They didn't live with a sense of urgency and an understanding of what it means to wake up to the injustices around them, climate disruption, and readiness to meet Christ. They perhaps were thinking you can time the market on Jesus' return.

So, in this first weekend in Advent, Jesus and Paul are telling us to get ready for the return of Jesus... to keep awake. This is hard to wrap our heads around. We have been waiting for Jesus' return for nearly 2000 years... a delay of the second coming fatigue has set in among believers. But remember, Jesus himself says no one knows except for God the Father when he will return. One of two things could happen as we wait: either Jesus does come soon or we will die first. So how do we live now during these in-between times?

I like to think of Advent is a season of spiritual house cleaning. You know how hard you are working to get ready for guests to come during the holidays... you don't want them to see how you truly live... right? Well, I have news for you, God already knows everything about us... and how unkempt we are... and God still loves us... and wants us to be honest with ourselves and others. Jesus is going to come regardless of how put together we appear.

Both Advent and Lent are what we call penitential seasons in the church year. The colors are purple or blue. I think of Elvis's song "Blue Christmas." Being blue means you are down about something or you have a broken heart. So, in the church, when we break those colors out, it is a time to look at the areas of our lives where we are falling short... to repent and make some life changes that prepare for the Lord's coming. We are to clean our spiritual houses and take an assessment of our lives. We are to confess our sins, forgive those whom we need to forgive, say

sorry to the people we have hurt, wake up to injustices in the world, and live every day like the light of Christ is shining on us for everyone to see.

The problem for the disciples of Jesus and early Christians was thinking they could time the market on salvation or the second coming of Jesus? They would go on living as they always did before they knew Christ and the salvation that comes from our faith. The good news however is in the warning of both Jesus and Paul. We still have time to take care of unfinished business. We need to be ready at all times... because we don't know if this is our last day on earth.

In my first call, I had a grain elevator manager in our congregation named Denny. He told me farmers notoriously miss the market highs when selling their grain. When the price of grain is up, they think it will go higher so they wait to sell. If it is down they will wait till it goes up again, but the oversupply in grain bins keeps the price lower. He told me, a smart farmer would market a portion of his or her grain every month. Then you will catch the swings in the market and lower their risk. Being a Christian doesn't mean you just live only for yourself and then one day make a change to treat others in a more Christlike manner. It is about living it out daily.

So how do we live now as we wait for Christ to come? Paul says in our Romans lesson that we need to put on Christ. He is saying you need to be clothed in Christ daily. You received this clothing in your baptism. So, In the midst of Black Friday shopping, Small Business Saturday and Cyber Monday when we help retailers get in the black, we are called to put on clothes you can't buy... our Christian wardrobe. Paul tells the Roman Christians to put on the armor of light and to throw away your old clothes of darkness like reveling, drunkenness, debauchery, licentiousness, quarreling and jealousy. We may not use some of these words daily, but the point is, get rid of your vices. Eliminate the things that tempt you to be turned in on yourself or draw you away from loving God and the neighbor. Live with Christian ethics and live at night the same way you would live in the day.

This reminds me of the Tim McGraw song, "To Live Like You Were Dying." It's about a man whose father was given a terminal diagnosis and was telling his son how he is going to live now:

The second verse says:

"I was finally the husband
That most of the time I wasn't
And I became a friend a friend would like to have
And all of a sudden going fishin'

Wasn't such an imposition
And I went three times that year I lost my dad
I finally read the Good Book, and I
Took a good, long, hard look
At what I'd do if I could do it all again
He said
"I went skydiving
I went Rocky Mountain climbing
I went 2.7 seconds on a bull named Fumanchu
And I loved deeper
And I spoke sweeter
And I gave forgiveness I'd been denying"
And he said
"Someday I hope you get the chance
To live like you were dying"

The good news is, we are never going to get it just right. We can try, but we will fall short of the Glory of God. We will continue to sin. But because of our Christian wardrobe, we are promised forgiveness daily.

Jesus has come and continues to come among us. In church today as we gather, Jesus promises to be here. In communion we get to celebrate Jesus' real presence with us. There we are forgiven and set free to love deeper, speak sweeter, and to forgive others the way we have been forgiven.