

Psalm 122

- ¹ I was glad when they said to me,
“Let us go to the house of the Lord!”
- ² Our feet are standing
within your gates, O Jerusalem.
- ³ Jerusalem—built as a city
that is bound firmly together.
- ⁴ To it the tribes go up,
the tribes of the Lord,
as was decreed for Israel,
to give thanks to the name of the Lord.
- ⁵ For there the thrones for judgment were set up,
the thrones of the house of David.
- ⁶ Pray for the peace of Jerusalem:
“May they prosper who love you.
- ⁷ Peace be within your walls,
and security within your towers.”
- ⁸ For the sake of my relatives and friends
I will say, “Peace be within you.”
- ⁹ For the sake of the house of the Lord our God,
I will seek your good.

Romans 13:11-14

¹¹ Besides this, you know what time it is, how it is now the moment for you to wake from sleep. For salvation is nearer to us now than when we became believers; ¹² the night is far gone, the day is near. Let us then lay aside the works of darkness and put on the armor of light; ¹³ let us live honorably as in the day, not in reveling and drunkenness, not in debauchery and licentiousness, not in quarreling and jealousy. ¹⁴ Instead, put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires.

Matthew 24:36-44

³⁶ “But about that day and hour no one knows, neither the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. ³⁷ For as the days of Noah were, so will be the coming of the Son of Man. ³⁸ 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, ³⁹ and they knew nothing until the flood came and swept them all away, so too will be the coming of the Son of Man. ⁴⁰ Then two will be in the field; one will be taken and one will be left. ⁴¹ Two women will be grinding meal together; one will be taken and one will be left. ⁴² Keep awake therefore, for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming. ⁴³ 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. ⁴⁴ Therefore you also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an unexpected hour.

Sermon: What are you waiting for?

'Do you know what time it is?' Paul asks.

Time is a weird thing. It exists, and yet it doesn't. We manipulate time – just a few weeks ago we all just changed our clocks, and like that, through a simple exercise of the will time changed. So we control time to a certain extent, but we're also slaves to time. Though we don't like to think about it, deep down we all know that we only have a certain allotment of days in our lives – our time is limited.

We live under the tyranny of time. As the Christmas season approaches time will become even more of a scarce commodity as we try to fit in extra dinners and visiting, shopping, travelling – all while putting in extra hours at work so that we can take a few days off.

Technology has accentuated the problem. With our cell phones and computers we can be connected 24/7 through texts, emails, facetime, skype, snapchat, twitter – sometimes we even use cell phones to actually talk to each other. The point is, because we can be so connected often we think we ought to always be connected. This eats into more of our time.

The way we measure time has changed the way we think about and understand it. Do you remember in the 70's and 80's when digital watches and clocks became popular? They were easy to read, and cheap to make. And they changed our perception of time.

As we look at a digital clock ticking off seconds, we see moment to moment - disconnected units of time. 10:53 stands alone, a discreet, independent minute. This is very different from our older analogue or dial clocks and watches. As the second hand sweeps around we can see the moment as it passes, but we're also caught up in the flow of time as second follows second. We can easily visualize both the future and the past. Two hours until lunch, 6 hours since I woke up. We know where we stand between the beginning and ending of the day; the dial clock is much more like marking time through the movement of the sun.

Paul perceives time more in this continuous way, he sees continuity and progress, a movement from the past into the future. But, just as time had a beginning in creation, time will also have an end. A new age is coming, which Paul compares to a new day. The moment when the darkness of night begins to give way to shadows, there is just enough light to begin to perceive; this moment is a time of anticipation. It's time to savour the moment, and then get up and get dressed.

This is what Advent is – a time of anticipation – of seeing a light on the horizon. We get confused sometimes about what this season is about. Advent is not Christmas. Christmas is the first coming of Christ in the form of a little baby. Advent is our looking forward to the second coming of Christ – this time it's not going to be a baby, but a God of judgement with a sword in his mouth. A little harder to put that image on a card isn't it?

This morning we lit the candle of hope. We don't have hope for the past, though its roots and foundation can be found there. Hope is future oriented. Hope is about what is coming.

Paul writes 'Who hopes for what they already have? But if we hope for what we do not yet have, we wait for it patiently.' So our hope, our Advent, is about we don't yet have - something in the future – and that something is the new age that Jesus will bring.

Paul sees this new age coming – and he wants us to be prepared. He doesn't give an exact time, but it's clear that he thinks it's very immanent. The moment to wake is now because the day of salvation is nearer to us now than it was yesterday – the night is far gone; the day is near.

In writing this Paul would have been familiar with the story of Noah which Jesus refers to in our gospel reading. In Noah's time nobody knew of the impending disaster to come. They were eating and drinking – normal daily activities. They were getting married – getting married shows that you think you have a future. Nobody knew what was coming. They are not faulted for their sinfulness, they merely assumed that the business as usual world would continue forever. As Dan Quisenberry, baseball player said, The future is much like the present, only longer. They were living with a lack of imagination, with no faith. They were living hedonistically, with no real thought of what may be around the corner.

We have an advantage in that we have an idea of what is coming – Jesus is coming as the agent of justice whose task it is to right everything wrong so that his kingdom can be realized in its fullness. But we don't know when this is going to happen. Some people think they know – they read the bible with a fine-toothed comb and compare it to Fox news and make their predictions – but if Jesus says no one knows, not the angels of heaven, not even himself, then for us to think we can figure it out is clearly absurd.

So, instead, many of us have gone in the opposite direction. In 2000 years, our sense of anticipation and immanence has faded and we think that perhaps Jesus isn't coming. Maybe, instead of a world-wide judgement there is only individual judgement after death.

In the end, though, it makes little difference. Whether we believe that Jesus is coming to judge the whole world at the same time, or if we think that Jesus will judge each of us individually after we die – still we don't know the day. I don't know when I'll die. I could have 50 years left, or 50 minutes. In the same way, Jesus' day of judgement may be today, or not for another thousand years.

It's not about knowing the day. It was never about knowing the day – for Paul or for Jesus. Our anticipation is not so much about circling a date on a calendar as it is about living with hope.

Paul asks, do you know what time it is. It is time to wake up because every moment in time is rich in divine possibility. Every moment could be it – and every day that we keep breathing brings us inevitably closer to that day. It just keeps getting more likely – not less.

Because that day is ever more likely we need to develop the art of watchful living. Don't just let the days waste away but be aware. Jesus described the people at work in the fields and courtyards – these activities are necessary – we aren't going to quit our jobs and sit in a trance waiting. We don't avoid this life because we're waiting for the next, but as we live our ordinary day to day lives we are peering through the ordinary to the coming of that one extraordinary day. The field, the mill, the daily grind, this everyday, mundane world is where faithfulness happens. The daily work we do is to be done with a spirit of wakefulness or watchfulness. These days the popular term is mindfulness – it all means the same thing.

Every day is a day of judgement; every day we should be asking ourselves 'am I living in the way of Christ? Have I allowed myself to be distracted by selfish cares, or do I stand for truth and righteousness?'

And this is not a judgement of condemnation. For who is there to condemn? Only Christ. The same Christ who bore our condemnation on the cross. The same Christ who sits at the right hand of the Father praying on our behalf.

This changes the way that we think about judgement, and about the way we live. With Jesus as our judge we don't live our lives fearfully, burying our talent in the ground in hopes of staving off punishment. Instead, we act mindfully in the present – intentionally – to sow the hope that we feel into the world.

If there is judgement there must be a hereafter. And if there is a hereafter then there is continuity – some things from this world must persist into the next. These things that persist are the kingdom seeds that we sow today, but that doesn't happen by accident.

This is why Paul urges us to wake up and Jesus cautions us to be watchful. Don't live blindly, but be aware that some of our seemingly mundane actions will last forever. Make them count. There is more to today than meets the eye. There is more to this moment than we generally think.

Recognizing the seeds of eternity contained within this moment is the purpose of Lent. Karl Barth writes of this present moment, the now, when both the past and the future stand still. The former ceases it's going, and the latter its coming. This is the moment that is Advent. This is our moment of Hope.

So let's pause, enter this moment, and wait together in hopeful anticipation.

"Sleeper, awake!
Rise from the dead,
and Christ will shine on you."
Ephesians 5:14

Amen.