

## Psalm 122

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

## Romans 13:11-14

<sup>11</sup> 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; <sup>12</sup> 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; <sup>13</sup> let us live honorably as in the day, not in reveling and drunkenness, not in debauchery and licentiousness, not in quarreling and jealousy. <sup>14</sup> Instead, put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires.

## Matthew 24:36-44

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

## Sermon: What are you waiting for?

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be pleasing to you, O Lord, our rock and our redeemer.

‘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. 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. Not quite as pretty a picture to put on a card is it?

This morning Paige, Luke and Nancy 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 something in the future – that something is the new age that Jesus will bring with his return.

Paul uses a lot of contrasts in what we read this morning. Asleep, awake, night and day, dark and light; there's a distinct eschatological flavour to the text, he's trying to show the contrast between the old and new ages. The night is about to end, the day is at hand, put off actions of your former life, put on the

armour of light for the impending final battle between good and evil. While the new age is marked by peace and unity – let's not forget that any transition, any change, comes with loss and pain as the old gives way to the new. While we look forward to the new age, we had best keep this in mind.

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.

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 even, then for us to claim that knowledge 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 some 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 still makes little difference. Whether we believe that Jesus is coming to judge the whole world, or if we think that Jesus will judge us 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 a decade.

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. Clearly, he didn't know, since it's been quite a few centuries and Parousia hasn't happened yet, but he is absolutely right that it's 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 we cannot know, but we do know we're getting closer, we need to develop the art of watchful living. Daily work in the field and courtyard as Jesus describes is necessary to maintain life, but we must always peer through these ordinary days to discern the coming of that extraordinary day. The field, the mill, the daily grind, this region of the mundane is where faithfulness happens. The daily work we do is to be accomplished with a spirit of wakefulness or watchfulness. These days the popular term is mindfulness – it all means much 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?'

Christ has already come. The same Jesus who is to be our judge has already received judgement for our sake. We wait in hope because we wait in this memory. We are not to live in fear of the future but in thankfulness for the life in the kingdom which Christ already offers us. We live in trust that God will continue what he has begun in Christ.

Karl Barth writes of this present moment, the now, when past and 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.

Let's take some quiet time to enter this moment, and wait together in hopeful anticipation.

"Sleeper, awake!

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