

"God's Timetable."

Isaiah 2:1-5; Ps. 122; Matthew 24:36-44

Rev. David E. Young

Chapel Lane Presbyterian Church

The First Sunday of Advent, December 2, 2007

Here we are, once again, at the top of the year. Things have come full circle and we've arrived at the first Sunday of Advent. Advent is a dangerous season. It is superimposed (or perhaps more accurately) lurks underneath all the busy-ness of this time of year. In the midst of the buying and wrapping and the frenzy we are called to step back and hear a different drummer.

It's a dangerous season because everything is on a schedule and we know exactly how much time is left before "the Big Day". To celebrate Advent is to run the risk of bucking the system and having the weight of it all come crashing down on top of you. It's a bit like that commercial where everyone is buying this and buying that and the line is moving smoothly until one person pulls out her checkbook and everything grinds to a halt.

Advent is a checkbook in a credit card world. It slows things down and disrupts the flow.

If we likened the march of time at this season of the year to a train or a bus we'd know that now is not the time to stand on the tracks or in the street and try to stop the movement. No. One must either get on board or get out of the way. For Advent calls us into a different time and a different timetable.

But, for people of faith who live with one foot in their culture and one foot in the kingdom, we have another option besides jumping on board or jumping out of the way. We can also look at the promises of God and the timetable that he sets before us on the

road to a very different destination from what the world has its sights fixed on and we can jump on board that train.

And so today, Advent starts by calling us to look ahead rather than to look backward, to see Christmas as the beginning of the end of all time in Christ's Second Coming, rather than as just the celebration of his birth in Bethlehem so long ago.

Advent directs our focus toward that time when Christ will fulfill his promise to us and to all creation. However, it is a promise he makes without a crucial piece of information. He promises he will return but he cannot say when.

Nevertheless, the promise is made with assurance and faith because the promise is made by God and because God is trustworthy. It is a resurrection promise born out of the Easter story. That's why we can look forward in Advent with hope and expectation - - - but with a very different agenda.

Advent calls us to watch and to wait. It tells us to buy a ticket for God's train, but it doesn't give us God's timetable.

As much as we might long or hope for Christ's return, we cannot force it to happen. It may be our heart's desire, but it is out of our control. We have to wait for God to act.

Advent reminds us that we aren't in charge of the timing of eternity. But then again, neither is Jesus. He is quite clear in his denial of knowledge: "... but about that day and hour no one knows, neither the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father."

Not knowing the schedule means every day could be that day. The call to the Christian therefore is to keep awake, to be on the lookout, to be prepared.

But we can't live at that fever pitch all the time. It is too easy to get lulled into a sense of complacency about the timing of things. We think we have all the time in the world, but we don't. We think we can put off important tasks to another day, but we really can't.

Jesus describes a rather common, matter-of-fact scenario out of which cataclysm comes. He likens it to the time of Noah when the people around him were "eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage". He talks about workers in the field and women grinding grain. These are very ordinary tasks and it is into that ordinariness that God breaks in with the fulfillment of his promise.

Jesus calls us to pay attention, to live a little less casually, but not by always looking over our shoulder or taking on the role of Chicken Little and crying "the sky is falling". Rather, Jesus in Advent calls us to remember that he will come again and in fact he has already arrived.

His message is for all time and for our time. Now is the time to act like Christ's people, to live righteously and honorably, to live with joyful expectation of what God has planned.

It is time to focus in on the vision of God's future.

Isaiah shows us God's vision for the future. He sees the nations streaming toward Zion to learn the ways of God. He sees an end to the heretofore unending cycles of violence and exploitation.

The promise of peace is fulfilled. Weapons of death become the tools that give life. No one learns the ways of war anymore. God causes justice to blossom in the desert of our lives.

This is an important vision of hope for the world. For we live in the midst of a culture that is relentless in its pursuit of happiness. It thinks, on the one hand, that it has all the time in the world and can therefore put off making tough decisions and acting responsibly. But, on the other hand, it thinks time is running out and it has to grab for everything it can get.

It equates peace with being left alone. We more often hear the phrase "peace and quiet" than "peace and justice," because "peace and quiet" simply means that the disturbing sounds of suffering are drowned out. It doesn't mean we have done anything except close the door or put on some muzak.

Peace and justice means that we've attended to the needs of the oppressed and the widow and the orphan. It means we have taken a fearless look at ourselves and decided not to put off our repentance for another day.

Being committed to peace and justice means that we know we are not at peace until there is justice for all God's people.

In Isaiah's Advent vision, the peace God brings is anything but quiet! It is filled with the sounds of hammers striking anvils as swords are transformed into plow blades through sweat and determination.

Such a transformation cannot happen apart from the presence of God. We are called in this Advent season to learn what God

requires. We are called to redeem the time and shape our present to the eternal purposes of God. We are challenged to beat our "swords" of anger and aggression and hostility into instruments of healing and forgiveness and love.

May our Advent journey be filled with an awareness of the work we have to do, and may we be inspired to get on with it, because we know that God's timetable is in motion. It is exciting to be a part of his kingdom and to move to the beat of his transforming timing, and not just to the pace of the world's clock.

Let us pray:

Holy God, in this dangerous season of Advent may we find a way to keep your timing in mind. May we be forward looking even as we are filled with warm memories and rich traditions. We are thankful for your First Coming as a baby born in Bethlehem. May we be energized by your promised Second Coming, filled with a sense of joy and hope and determination to live as your people this day and every day. Amen.

This document was created with Win2PDF available at <http://www.daneprairie.com>.
The unregistered version of Win2PDF is for evaluation or non-commercial use only.