

Christmas is Coming

Ad1 YrC November 27, 2022 Matthew 24:36-44

Rev. Peter Smith <http://www.stjamesuc.com>

Christmas is coming. When I say those words near the end of November there are usually three types of reactions that people have. The first is from those who respond “Christmas is a long way off and there’s still lots of time.” And honestly it is still November and there is plenty that we can do between now and December 25th.

The second reaction people have is when they realize that this is the first Sunday of Advent and there are only four weeks before Christmas Day. And that’s when the panic sets in because that means the 25th is a lot closer than expected. It is actually too late to plan concerts and big events and the deadlines for things like mailing parcels are just around the corner.

The third reaction, which I admit is more often seen in the younger of those among us, is to have a big smile and say “It know and I can’t wait!” Which is usually followed by an excited description of what they hope and expect and are looking forward to in this season. Christmas is coming.

And this morning’s gospel lesson seems like a strange way to start the Sundays leading up to the birth of Jesus. After all they are words that describe the end of time not a baby in the manger. They talk about being ready not about angels singing in choirs. But the truth is that we start every Advent, every season where we prepare to look back at the events in Bethlehem, by looking forward to when Jesus will come again.

And we do that in order to better welcome Jesus into our lives and to understand that what God did in Bethlehem leads not just to the birth and life of Jesus but to his death, his resurrection, and ultimately the completion of God’s plan for salvation. For we remember what happened long ago in order to better live out what God has done for us in Jesus and so that we can be better ready for the days to come.

And this morning’s lesson cautions us to not assume that the end of time is so far ahead that we don’t need to think about it today. Because we are warned that the time is drawing closer and while we don’t know when that end will happen, the truth is that it will come sooner than we expect. And here I need to draw a

distinction.

Yes, the lesson is talking about the end of time, when the world and creation are changed from what we know into what God is bringing about. But what Jesus says also applies to our personal lives because the truth is that we don't live forever. And none of us know how long we have left on earth.

So the call of Jesus is for us to be ready for the end of time and for the end of life as we know it. To prepare our hearts and minds right now for what is coming. So if you have unresolved business take care of it now. Make peace with the person you are upset with today. Turn back to God and start living the best life possible right here and right now.

Because it is tempting to believe you have all the time in the world but the truth is that you don't. And you know what? Getting yourself ready- not putting off until tomorrow but what you should do today actually makes things better. Because you get rid of your burdens, you live more fully, you embrace the call to be a disciple.

And at this point I need to turn our attention back to the lesson for a moment. Because sometimes when we hear words like the ones from this morning we panic and think we don't have the time we need. That there is so much we have to do, so many improvements and changes we want to make in ourselves and our world, that there is no possible way we can ever be ready. And we start to worry and despair.

But the lesson never says God will only welcome you, only bless you, only let you be part of what is promised and going to happen, if you are absolutely and completely ready by the time the end comes. No, the lesson simply calls us to know the time when Jesus will come again is approaching quickly. So we need to prepare. And preparing is not the same as being completely ready and having every possible thing finished and done. Preparing is about starting what God asks now instead of waiting until later.

So take turn your eyes to God. Take another step in your journey of faith. Do what has to be done to get your mind and heart ready for Jesus. Because the point isn't that you need to be perfect before Jesus can come into your life. No, the point is to be the best person you can be at this moment so that you can receive and welcome what God is going to do and be part of what is God is bringing about.

And let me use the example of this season to help us think about those preparations of faith. Because at Christmas we often try to do more than we should. After all, there is always another concert to attend, another decoration to put up, another present to be bought, another thing that we could try and squeeze in before Christmas. But the truth is that Christmas happens whether do those extra things or not. I know we sometimes like to think that our actions are what makes Christmas special or important. But they don't. Christmas happens because of what God does, what God makes happen, what God provides.

So as you do what you need to do to welcome, receive, and embrace what God is doing, as you take the time to consider how you need to prepare for Jesus, give some thought as to what you don't need to do in order to be ready in your life. Because preparation is not only about doing things but also about changing our attitudes and focusing on what is important while leaving the trivial behind.

And one thing I think we as Christians need to reconsider is our attitude about what is coming. After all, we love to look back and see the good things and wish we were back there. We remember the great gatherings, the wonderful experiences and assume that is what should be happening today. But the lesson this morning reminds us that our eyes need to be looking not to the past but to the future. To see how we can make this year, this time better for everyone around us and for ourselves. And so that we can see that the promise of Jesus returning is a source a joy for us.

Because there were angels singing, shepherds running, and wise men travelling because of the news that the Messiah was arriving on earth. So if that is what happens with only the promise of what God is going to do, imagine the joy that will break forth when the Saviour who shattered the power of sin and death, the Shepherd who gathered the lost and forgotten, the Prince of Peace who opens up the future, returns to complete the salvation which God intends for the world.

For what lies ahead isn't something we should worry about but something we should look forward to. For the one who loves us, who died for us, who calls us to know God is coming. And as we get ready, as we build the kingdom of heaven here on earth through our words and our actions, we look forward to that time and that place where everything we hope for becomes a reality not just for us but for all people on earth.