

Is Something Happening?

Romans 13:11-14; Matthew 24:36-44

Slide: Advent Stock Photo

On December 3rd, 2005, I woke up fairly early and made some coffee for my Mother Joanne, who was visiting from Seattle. I remember her looking at me, smiling slyly and saying, "Well, are you ready? Something big is about to happen. Today, your life will change forever."

Now, perhaps her words were a bit different than that, but that is how I remember the start of the day. After all, something *was* about to happen that day to me. That day, I was ordained at Trinity Lutheran Church here in Eau Claire. Now, ordination occurs in our faith tradition only when a pastor receives a call from a congregation. And, my first call was to the people of Immanuel Lutheran Church of Strum, Wisconsin.

The day was a special day for me, as you might expect, and I was getting over a terrible cold, one that brought on laryngitis. Somehow I was able to croak out my first singing of the liturgy at the communion table! Yet, the whole day long, before I was ordained, there was the

anticipation as if something was about to happen that would change things for me.

I felt excitement, I felt prepared, but I also felt absolute terror, knowing that I was entering a solo pastorate as someone who had never done this before, at least not in the sense that I am now today. Indeed, something was happening, but I never could have guessed how it was to work out, nor how blessed it would be to be among the people of Strum and later to be here.

The feeling that something is about to happen... Have you ever had that feeling yourself? Is it a familiar feeling to you? It is a strange notion to feel that sense of anticipation for something unknown, but I think we all feel it often – that different job, having a child, going to college, anticipating a big vacation, whatever it may be, the anticipation can be exhilarating but often also fearful.

So, here we are at the start of the Advent season. The purpose, the reason for Advent is to focus upon waiting and anticipating the arrival of Jesus Christ. Advent is not Christmas. Advent is a focus upon the preparations of the Christ to

come, and therefore, we look at scriptures that enhance the past and future hopes of what Christ coming will bring. Advent reminds us that something is about to happen. Even the word Advent means arrival.

To understand this, as well as understand what this rather seemingly fearful bible reading from Matthew is saying, we should probably go back and remember what the first Christians were experiencing, those who lived just after Jesus ascended into heaven after his resurrection, thereby leaving his disciples and all of us to our faithful response as the called out ones.

These first followers of Christ remembered Jesus' promise to come again during the years after he had ascended into heaven and they fully expected that he would return in their lifetime. They did not have the same concept of time that we now have. To them, everything was happening in the present moment, not the future. The anticipation of something about to happen was very, very present for them.

The scripture reading we hear from Matthew today is an attempt of those first Christians to

describe what was to happen as Christ declares, in the language they would have understood. The anticipation of Christ's coming was clear as Jesus declares: "Therefore you also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an unexpected hour." This was a call to being ready at all times for Jesus to complete all things at the end of all things, which to them was expected to be almost immediately.

It may be interesting to note here that unlike today, the early days of these first Christ followers, the first to follow Jesus as the Messiah, they did not focus as much as we do on the birth of Jesus. The birth of Jesus was important, but it was not the focus of the early church. The early church focused primarily upon the Resurrection of Jesus AND what we call the second coming of Jesus rather than the whole birth, life, death, resurrection along with the promises of resurrection for those who died before that promise would occur. Their entire faith, in fact, was based upon the feeling as if Christ was about to return any second to redeem them. Every word, every deed, every prayer was shaped by the coming event of Christ.

And, we can see this deeply in the Gospel of Mark, which was the first Gospel written down, then Matthew later attributed to a Jewish community and lastly in the Gospel of Luke. These end time writings are very significant in these earlier Gospels as the people anticipated Christ's return as imminent. But by the time we get to reading John's Gospel, written decades later, we see that emphasis changes from expectation of Christ's return, to our faithful life and how to live life as we wait for Christ's promises to give us a dwelling place, an eternal life through faith and believing in Jesus as the Truth, the Way and the Life.

Well, as you may see then, it's difficult to stay on tiptoe for over two thousand years, which is why I think we need a season to remind ourselves that indeed Christ will come again into our lives, and it could be today. In fact, it could already be here and in us. Maybe you know what it's like when you are eagerly anticipating the future. Suddenly, you may be amazed at the energy you will put into something, knowing that something is happening or about to happen. You are sprung into action and your action has purpose.

Like expecting parents, who have the energy for assembling cribs, painting Winnie the Pooh on the walls of the nursery, this time of the church year is also meant to be like that...renewed energy as we anticipate an event, that time when God will wipe away every tear and live with us, where we will practice war no more and enter the gates of the Lord's house with gladness.

What the biblical writers and those first Christians came to understand is that every moment of the passing day is already alive with the promise of God's future. As Christian people who look toward the horizon of the Kingdom that is drawing near, we also have choices in our knowing when something is about to happen. We can choose to be a people of:

- Faithfulness or denial
- Action or passivity
- Hope or despair

And for those who believe that in God's good time something will happen, they also know that something is also happening now, in them, through them, with the help of the Holy Spirit of Christ.

Occasionally in worship, when preparing for Holy Communion, and especially in the Easter season, we declare the mystery of our faith: Christ has died, Christ is risen, Christ will come again. We ask that our Lord come to us and that we stand ready in anticipation. But, we do not simply wait. We do not tire in our waiting. We prepare for Christ's coming by serving and bringing about pieces of that promised time here on earth. Christ's coming happens now through us as his hands and feet in service. It does not only occur at a future time.

Therefore, whenever we give food to the hungry, serve at community table, quilt our quilts, and teach Sunday school. Whenever we get rid of our clothing to a clothing drive, or knit mittens for Lutheran Social Services, we do not do it naively thinking that it will solve all of the world's needs because we never can do that.

But, we do these things because we live in the anticipation of Christ's coming, that Christ will come again in glory to redeem us and all of creation whether now or after our deaths. We live now in the promise of tomorrow. Therefore, today and always, in every way we can, let

us pray for, expect for, and hope for something to happen, even as we cry, Come Lord Jesus. Amen.