

“Christ has Died, Christ is Risen, Christ will come Again”
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Jeremiah 33:14-16

14The days are surely coming, says the LORD, when I will fulfill the promise I made to the house of Israel and the house of Judah. 15In those days and at that time I will cause a righteous Branch to spring up for David; and he shall execute justice and righteousness in the land. 16In those days Judah will be saved and Jerusalem will live in safety. And this is the name by which it will be called: "The LORD is our righteousness."

Luke 21:25-36

25"There will be signs in the sun, the moon, and the stars, and on the earth distress among nations confused by the roaring of the sea and the waves. 26People will faint from fear and foreboding of what is coming upon the world, for the powers of the heavens will be shaken. 27Then they will see 'the Son of Man coming in a cloud' with power and great glory. 28Now when these things begin to take place, stand up and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near."

29Then he told them a parable: "Look at the fig tree and all the trees; 30as soon as they sprout leaves you can see for yourselves and know that summer is already near. 31So also, when you see these things taking place, you know that the kingdom of God is near. 32Truly I tell you, this generation will not pass away until all things have taken place. 33Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.

34"Be on guard so that your hearts are not weighed down with dissipation and drunkenness and the worries of this life, and that day catch you unexpectedly, 35like a trap. For it will come upon all who live on the face of the whole earth. 36Be alert at all times, praying that you may have the strength to escape all these things that will take place, and to stand before the Son of Man."

Last week, it was Christ the King Sunday, the last Sunday of the church year.
 A Sunday when we celebrated a King who never sat on a throne or levied a tax,
 but a king, The king, who ruled by serving.
 Who commanded by inviting. A grand contradiction.

Today, the contradiction continues.
 It's now the first Sunday of the church year.
 The first Sunday of Advent.
 And we celebrate preparing to celebrate the birth of Christ
 by remembering that Christ has promised to come again.

We start the most wonderful time of year with scriptures that talk about the signs that will happen- the earth in distress. Sun, moon, stars all in on it.

It's a theme throughout the gospels- because it's a theme in the Hebrew Bible

Isaiah 13 uses these words:

For the stars of the heavens and their constellations will not give their light; the sun will be dark at its rising, and the moon will not shed its light.

Ezekiel 32:

When I blot you out, I will cover the heavens, and make their stars dark;

And Joel 2:

I will show portents in the heavens and on the earth, blood and fire and columns of smoke.

We start the year this way because it is a central tenet of faith, the words that we say or reference at the Lord's Table each time we gather for communion-

Christ has Died, Christ IS Risen, Christ will come again.

Are we living in the End Times? Yes. We always have been.

That's why Luke and the other writers of the Gospels are writing about it. Because people were asking about it. They wanted to know-

What are we supposed to do?

What are we supposed to do while we wait, while we look for Jesus' return?

Sometimes, we ask these questions because we are faithful-

Sometimes, though, we ask these questions because we don't want to get caught-

Like the bumper sticker says, "Jesus is coming, look busy!"



So, what are we supposed to do?

It's the perfect question for us.

Because we love doing. We are good at doing.

And there may be no other time of year when there is more to do than this time of year.

Decorating.
 Entertaining.
 Buying.
 Wrapping.
 Giving.
 Cooking.
 Traveling.
 Gathering.
 Helping.

And on top of it all, we're in Advent.
 If you were at the Advent Craft Fair this morning you got an advent calendar-
 another thing to do.

What does it take to be a Christian?
 What does a Christian do?

In answer to this, it may be helpful to notice what Luke writes at the end of this passage "36 Be alert at all times, praying that you may have the strength to escape all these things that will take place, and to stand before the Son of Man."

D. Mark Davis, a Presbyterian pastor in California¹ writes:

It certainly strikes me that the point of this text is to watch - not *how* to watch, but just to watch. And, I wonder if the preacher of this text can be content with that. We typically hear the 'how', the 'what we must do now,' and so forth, but we rarely hear that watching or expectation is – in and of itself – an act of faithfulness.

Maybe we, I've been asking the wrong questions-
 it isn't about what to do while we are waiting, it's that we wait that is important.
 As with the Christian Life in general, it isn't about doing, it is about being.

Henri Nouwen was a respected priest and professor in the 1980s when he decided that God was calling him in another direction- to live and work with the L'Arche community- a community where differently-abled adults live with assistants.

Nouwen moved to France where he was assigned to live and work with Adam. He writes²:

In August 1986 I met Adam for the first time [a young man who could not speak or move without assistance] and...I was soon asked the question, 'Henri, would you help Adam in the morning to get ready for his day? It means doing his morning routine.'
 [Everything to get him ready for the day.] I began with fear and trembling.

¹ <http://leftbehindandlovingit.blogspot.com/2012/11/the-imperative-of-expectation.html>

² Adam: God's Beloved by Henri J.M. Nouwen © 1997 New York: Orbis Books, Maryknoll. 128 pp.

At first I had to keep asking myself and others, ‘Why have you asked me to do this? Why did I say yes? What am I doing here? Who is this stranger who is demanding such a big chunk of my time each day? Why should I, the least capable of all the people in the house, be asked to take care of Adam and not of someone whose needs are a bit less?’ The answer was always the same: ‘So you can get to know Adam.’ Now that was a puzzle for me. Adam often looked at me and followed me with his eyes, but he did not speak or respond to anything I asked him. Adam didn’t smile when I did something well or protest when I made a mistake. I wondered if he even recognised me. How would I get to know him? What, I asked myself, was he thinking, was he feeling, was he sensing? What was his experience with me?...

And while I, the so-called ‘normal’ person, kept wondering how much Adam was like me, he had no need to make any comparisons. He simply lived and by his life invited me to receive his unique gift, wrapped in weakness but given for my transformation. While I tended to worry about what I did and how much I could produce, Adam was announcing to me that ‘being is more important than doing.’ While I was preoccupied with the way I was talked about or written about, Adam was quietly telling me that ‘God’s love is more important than the praise of people.’ While I was concerned about my individual accomplishments, Adam was reminding me that ‘doing things together is more important than doing things alone.’ Adam couldn’t produce anything, had no fame to be proud of, couldn’t brag of any award or trophy. But by his very life, he was the most radical witness to the truth of our lives that I have ever encountered.

There is nothing sweet or pious about this. Many men and women assisted Adam during the 11 years that he lived at Daybreak, and they all can tell stories about the gift of caring for him.

Speaking about ‘Adam’s gift’ is not romanticising an otherwise quite demanding and unrewarding life situation. Adam’s gift was a reality of everyday living.

The difference between being and doing.

Advent, at the beginning of Advent, we are reminded of these contradictions.

That Jesus is going to come again,

and while it may be alongside some pretty terrifying signs,
that Jesus will come again is good news. Really good news.

What has God done every time God has intervened or sent a messenger?

It is a message of love, of possibility. Of how to proceed in faith.

That Jesus will come again is REALLY. REALLY Good news.

To get ready, there isn’t something we need to do, we need to be-

Be the children of God we were created to be.

Be more ourselves.

And allow that image of God to shine from within.

God doesn't call us to give up who we are in order to follow, to watch, to wait.

God calls us to be more of who we are.

That's why it isn't a sacrifice when we follow God,
it's a living into the children we were created to be.

God isn't calling you to be Henri Nouwen,
to choose a life at L'Arche community and let go of the academic world.
Henri Nouwen already did that.

God isn't calling you to be like Jason Brown, who I mentioned a sermon or two ago-
to choose a life of farming and feeding over a life in the NFL.

Jason Brown already did that.

God isn't even calling you to be Jesus.

Jesus already did that.

God is calling you to be you.

To BE you.

Not do, but be.

And allow your life to pour from there, from that place.

You can't earn your salvation.

You can't earn God's love.

There is nothing you can do to earn that. It is given.

God calls us to be. You. Me. Us. Fully. Completely.

Just as we were wonderfully and fearfully made.

If you rely on what you can do this holiday season, you are going to fail.

You'll never get it all done.

You'll never get it all done perfectly.

You'll never be able to make everyone happy.

And I can tell you this with certainty, because I try it every year.

And every year I fail.

Already this year, I've forgotten to do something I promised to do.

And I'm going to have to tell someone I don't have time to do something

I told them I would do, back in September.

But, if you let go of the doing in favor of being,

you have the chance of transforming everything- of being transformed.

Let it begin, here, at the table.

Where we are invited not because of what we do, but because of who we are.

God's beloved children.