

St. James' Episcopal Church Cindy Baskin  
Advent 1A – November 28, 2010 – **9:15 Family Service**  
Texts: Is 2:1-5; Ps 122; Rom 13:11-14; Matt 24:36-44

**Theme:** We must be ready.

**Scripture:** [Jesus said] *Therefore you also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an unexpected hour* (Matt 24:44).

**Visuals:** Portable Radio; batteries; flashlight; jug of water; fully charged cell phone

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## The Gospel

I have here some items: a portable radio; batteries; flashlight; jug of water; a fully charged cell phone. If you see me gathering these things together, what would you suspect I might be doing? (*Wait for answers from the congregation.*)

That's right. I'm probably getting prepared in case a storm hits. It might be that a tornado is predicted or a blizzard like we had last year; but some kind of situation for which being prepared is well advised. I might need the radio so that I can listen to any updates on the weather. I might need a flashlight to be prepared in case the power goes out. The water will give me something to drink in case the plumbing doesn't work. Weathermen may be able to forecast a hurricane or a flood or a blizzard, but they can't always tell how severe or devastating these natural disasters might be. Natural disasters are often unpredictable.

The Bible talks about unexpected natural disasters. In fact, Jesus mentions one in the gospel reading we just heard that was a very big disaster! Can anyone remember what it is? (*Allow answers.*)

The Great Flood! Do you remember the Bible story of Noah and the ark? God told Noah to build an ark because a great flood was coming. Noah did as God told him, even though his neighbors made fun of him. And when the great flood came, just as God predicted, Noah was ready. All the neighbors who had laughed and made fun of him were swept away by the flood waters!

In today's gospel lesson, Jesus reminds people about Noah's flood and compares his second coming to the flood. Jesus' coming will be just as unexpected! And therefore we should be prepared at all times, as if Jesus will be coming that very day!

## Advent and Christ's Second Coming

Today is the first day of Advent – that season of our church year that calls us to prepare. The word “advent” comes from the Latin word *adventus*—which means “coming.” Traditionally Advent has had a 3-fold focus: 1) the coming of Christ as a babe in Bethlehem – the Christmas event; 2) the coming of Jesus into our lives again (as a line in the Christmas carol, *O Little Town of Bethlehem*, prays: “*Be born in us today*,” and 3) Christ's second coming “in glory” at the end of time.

*For salvation is nearer to us now than when we became believers; the night is far gone, the day is near* (Rom 13:11b-12).

[Jesus said] *Therefore you also must be ready, for you the Son of Man is coming at an unexpected hour* (Matt 24:44).

Christ's Second Coming is not some “minor” doctrine of the Church that's rarely mentioned in the Bible or based on some insignificant, obscure passage. All of chapter 24 in Matthew's Gospel, from which today's gospel is taken, talks about the end of the age. The longest single, uninterrupted discourse of Jesus in Mark's gospel (32 verses) deals

with the end times and the return of Christ in glory. Interestingly, Christ's 2<sup>nd</sup> Coming is mentioned in 23 of the 27 books of the New Testament with 318 references, averaging to about one out of every fifteen verses. It's a prominent theme – and one to which we attest every time we proclaim our faith in the words of the Nicene Creed, saying, "*He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead and his kingdom will have no end.*" Scripture repeatedly proclaims that Jesus Christ is coming again!!

Yet, focusing on Christ's second coming can produce two quite different reactions among Christians. On the one hand, there are, to quote one author:

[Some Christians] "think that the whole emphasis . . . is much ado about nothing, or at least nothing believable. If they are faithful churchgoers, they endure the annual Advent apocalyptic texts and look forward to next week, when John the Baptist, that tangible historical figure, helps us look forward to Jesus."<sup>1</sup>

On the other hand, there are those Christians who so focus on Christ's second coming that they search the bible for signs of the end times and then search the newspaper to see if those signs are yet in view. The problem is that those Christians who ignore any teaching about the last things are tempted to fall into a state of perpetual apathy; while those who focus on the last things can easily fall into a state of perpetual anxiety.

Jesus teaching in today's gospel is not meant to encourage us to be either apathetic nor anxious, but instead this passage encourages us to walk in faith and hope, living prepared. The primary thrust of the gospel text today is that we need to **live prepared**– TO GET READY! Although we may not know nor even be able to anticipate the day of Christ's Second Coming, we are called to develop the art of watchful living. We are not expected to know everything, but we are expected to do something.

### **Living Prepared**

What would such "doing" or preparation look like? Paul gives us a clue in today's epistle reading when he writes: *Let us then lay aside the works of darkness and put on the armor of light; let us live honorably as in the day, not in reveling and drunkenness, not in debauchery and licentiousness, not in quarreling and jealousy. Instead, put on the Lord Jesus Christ . . .*" How can we "*put on the Lord Jesus Christ*"? Try investing in a spiritual bank account. Just as investing money in a savings account can build up a financial reserve, so can regular investing into one's spiritual life: this occurs through regular worship, regular participation in the sacraments, and undertaking spiritual disciplines proven to be helpful over the centuries: fasting, prayer, self-examination.

As Christians we are also called to work eagerly for the kingdom of God; that is, to do the things Jesus did: caring for the poor; visiting the imprisoned; working for justice in our society, and loving one's neighbor as one's self. All of these very concrete and regular activities help us "*to put on the Lord Jesus.*"

Jesus Christ is coming again in glory – this Advent season is a call to be intentional in preparing in all of our life for this ultimate of all events.

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<sup>1</sup>David L. Bartlett, *feasting on the Word*, Year A, Vol. 1 Advent through Transfiguration, David L. Bartlett & Barbara Brown Taylor, editors (Louisville KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2010) 20.