

“Are you ready?”

Isaiah 2:1-5, Matthew 24:36-44
First Sunday of Advent

Pastor John Schwehn
Christ the King Lutheran Church
Nov. 27, 2016

So...Are you ready? This is the question of Advent. “You must be ready,” says Jesus, “for the Son of Man is coming at an unexpected hour.”

Now, I have to admit that the question “are you ready?” makes me feel a little more anxious these days than it normally would. You see, Anna and I are expecting our first child to be born pretty much any day now.

So, am I ready for this? In a word: No. I'm not. And, as hard as we try to *get* ready, to assert our own control where we can, I suspect there's really nothing I can do to really truly be ready for what's coming.

In fact, when other parents ask me “Are you ready?” I can usually detect a slight smirk forming at the corner of their mouth, revealing to me that what they're thinking in their head as they ask me this question is something like, “this guy has no idea what's coming for him.”

And I think these people are correct. I have no idea! And, if I'm going to be completely honest with you, I will confess that I'm a bit terrified. And yet...I know, somehow, that the coming of this child will be life-changing and world-shattering. I trust that this new thing will bring a joy and a love that I could not have known before. But still, I'm scared. I'm anxious. And really, I have no idea.

So this is how I am hearing Jesus' difficult words of judgment at the beginning of Advent. Advent – a season where we stand in longing and expectation before a God who promises to be with us. Advent – the beginning of the church year, where we stand against the darkness and witness to the light of God coming into the world. The hope we confess is life-changing and world-shattering, but it can also feel unsettling.

God is ready to be with us...but are we ready for God? Are we ready for what this means for our lives together?

After all, in our gospel reading for today, Jesus is describing judgment that will be unpredictable, unknowable, sudden. Not even Jesus seems to know when God will show up!

He says, “Two will be in the field, and one will be taken and one will be left.” “Two women will be grinding meal together; one will be taken and one will be left.”

Now I know what some of you are thinking. I know what I am thinking. “Certainly, if it's going to be a 50/50 kind of deal, I'm going to be the chosen one. Surely I will be among the righteous ones, right? It won't be that other person over there, that sinner, that rude person, that person who has made all the wrong choices in life, that Democrat, that

Republican, that person who I work with who I find to be really annoying. God is coming for me, not them."

"I'm on the good team," I think. Nervously. But, in our efforts to parse out who stays and who goes, I think we're missing something really important.

Yes, it's true: God comes to us in unpredictable and sudden ways.

And yes it's also true that, if we're not paying attention, if we're not ready, we might miss it.

But this is also true: God comes to us not in some flashy fire and brimstone, end-of-times kind of way. Pay attention to how Jesus describes it: God comes while we're out working in the field! While we're in the kitchen grinding meal! While we're at school, at work, at home, at play. God comes in the most ordinary, boring, mundane times and places.

And this is also true: that we encounter God's coming, God's judgment, when we stand shoulder to shoulder, side by side with our neighbor. Two by two. And God especially comes when that neighbor is someone we might believe to be an enemy, or through the person we least expect.

Think about the story we will tell this season. It is the story of an unwed teenager from an occupied land who bears within her God's love for the whole world. It is a confused carpenter who believes he must relocate this young woman and her child to Egypt in order to keep them safe. It is the story of astrologers – magicians who interpret signs in the stars – that first recognize who this baby truly is.

In other words, it's people who we might look at today as folks making, well, questionable life choices. But, in fact, they were pointing us to God all along. *They* are the ones shouting to us and to the world, "Wake up! This baby is coming and he is coming for you!"

In this season of light, we will sing the best carols and hymns. We will share in the holiday traditions passed on to us by family and culture. We will light a bunch of candles. But let's not forget that what we are doing is bearing witness to a mystery. We tell the story of a God who chooses to be with us. We worship a God who becomes human and wraps God's own self up, intimately, in the life of the world. In *your* life, and in mine.

If we're not awake to this truth, we might miss it. God is ready to be with us – are we ready to receive him?

There are so many different hopes and longings gathered together in this sanctuary right now. So church, perhaps one small thing we can do this season, along with all of the other things we love about this time of year, is to go out of our way to know a fellow member of this body of Christ.

If we listened to one another's own hopes and longings for the world, if we offered to be the light of Christ for and with our fellow brothers and sisters in Christ, we might

discover that our vision for what is possible in this world is quite wide and expansive and beautiful.

We might just find that God actually meant it when he called us salt and light! And this is the scary part of God's decision to dwell with us – it's the possibility that God will actually use us, God will actually call us, to be light-bearers with him.

Consider, my friends, the prophet Isaiah. The collective hope and longing of his community – displaced by war and exile – put forth a vision of what God's judgment looks like. Even in a place of isolation and suffering, Isaiah is light for his people. He writes about God...

He shall judge between the nations, **SLIDE**
and shall arbitrate for many peoples;
they shall beat their swords into ploughshares,
and their spears into pruning-hooks;
nation shall not lift up sword against nation,
neither shall they learn war any more.

Isaiah, and his community, longed for peace. They longed to return home. The tools of war would be turned into ploughshares and pruning-hooks, into tools of labor, tools used for feeding rather than killing.

Might we long for this, too? A world where we put down weapons, where we stopped practicing ways of violence and war? This is a world that God calls us to imagine together with him, now, today.

But here's the thing. Think again of the farmers in the field, of the women grinding meal. The work of God's kingdom, the work of hope, is accomplished by working side by side with one another. This is when God comes to dwell. We are called peacemakers, but we must wake up to the fact that we are called to be peacemakers with one another at all times. Each day is a day of judgment, an opportunity for God's light to break in, even as we are engaged in ordinary, daily callings alongside other people.

In other words, Wake up! Wake up right where you are! Right where you find yourself every day. God is showing up precisely there, using you, calling you to the way of peace!

What are the relationships in your life where God's peace is so badly needed?

Where are the places in your daily work where you have the power to speak peace to another, where you can influence change that makes the world more just, more loving, more in line with Isaiah's vision?

My friends, the good news for us this Advent is this: we are a people of hope. God promises to dwell with us, and God's promises are always good and true.

And the challenging news for us this Advent is this: that we are a people of hope! Into those places of pain and discord, where the broken ways of the world don't fit with

God's vision for a world made whole - there we are called to be. As people called to walk in the light of God, we must never tire of witnessing to God's hope, resting in the knowledge that Christ dwells with us there.

This season, may we all wake up to a world where we, like Isaiah, are called to be prophets and peacemakers.

So Wake up! God is offering you God's own presence, offering to be with you today. Are you ready for it?

Amen.