

Preacher: Ruth Preston Schilk
Date: Nov. 29, 2009, Advent 1
Scriptures: Jer. 33:14-16; Luke 21:25-36
Sermon: *Ready or Not, Here I Come!*

(Wait in silence)....

I'm *doing* what the banner says: "A time to wait."

Did this 'waiting' for me to begin feel strange or uncomfortable for you? Were you wondering if I had lost my place? my voice? my nerve or my mind?

Were you beginning to wonder if *someone* else was to do or say something before *I* spoke?

Waiting, even for a short a time can make us puzzled, impatient, even angry. Think about when the person in the vehicle ahead of you isn't moving although the light has been green for a while. How long do you wait before honking the horn at them?

Think about walking through the clinic door for an appointment and realizing there are six (or 206) people already in the que ahead of you. Do you think to yourself, "Oh good; I get to wait – a **long** time!"?

Think about the promise in scripture that Christ will return "with power and great glory" (Luke 21:27). *Do* you think about this? *Do* you *wait* for this? If waiting for Christmas, the celebration of God coming to earth in human flesh in Jesus seems hard to wait for, is it hard to wait for the resurrected Lord and Saviour Jesus to come *back* to earth?

God's people have always been asked to live in God's time:
Noah waited for God's timing for rain.
Abraham lived in God's time waiting for a son.

Moses was told to watch for God's time when the pillar of cloud or fire moved.

David trusted God's timing to make him king.

Even Jesus trusted God's time. From the beginning of his public work until "the hour is near" and "it is finished," Jesus lived within the hours and minutes, days and months of his heavenly Father [from "The Story-Formed Calendar" by Tara Malouf in *Mustard Seed Associates* e-newsletter, Nov. 2009].

It's not a strange thing, then, for Jesus to speak to his disciples (and through scripture, to *us*, his disciples *now*), about God's timing for events and how to live while waiting in God's time.

God's time, as Jesus describes, indicates that history is going somewhere. It has a purpose. There is a destination, a starting and a completion point. This is good news! Our lives are not happenstance; rather, God has given us a goal. We are to live "on purpose" and *in God's* unique purpose for each of us as we live in, with, and for Christ.

The goal of all of history is that Jesus Christ will be Lord of all. While He *is* Lord even now, His Lordship will one day become evident to and acknowledged by all of creation – in the heavenly bodies above, in the bodies of water below, and to all the nations of people on the earth (Luke 21:25-28).

When this time will **come**, no one knows, for "with the Lord one day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like one day" (2 Peter 3:8). But we can be assured that Jesus will indeed come again.

Some denominations who say the Apostles' Creed each Sunday, continually affirm in one particular line of the Creed that, "I believe in Jesus Christ, God's only Son, our Lord...[who] will come again to judge

the living and the dead.”

Many congregations during their celebration of communion and particularly at Easter hear the centuries-old declaration of the faithful:

Christ has died.

Christ is risen.

Christ will come again.

While these liturgical reminders are not typically part of **our** worship services, each year as the season of Advent begins, the scriptures designated by the lectionary don't let us forget the second coming of Christ is nearer now than it was last year or even yesterday.

And so we turn to Jesus' words that the gospel of Luke records in chapter 21. It seems that we are given, (as someone has described) “a peek at the ending of the movie.” Even though parts of it may be unsettling; [some people will faint with fear and foreboding of what is coming upon the world (Luke 21:26)]. We know that for Christians, however, everything turns out alright. We need not cower in fear. Rather, we are to rejoice, to lift up our heads. And why not raise our arms up too! This is good news to us. It's also our good news to share with those around us, so that they can also rejoice and not fear. What better time than now, to share what Christmas is really about, *who* it's really about, and that words to *O little town of Bethlehem* can be a one's personal prayer to God:

Cast out our sin, and enter in, be born in us today!

O come to us, abide with us, our Lord Immanuel!

Sometimes, the current state of affairs, (if not globally, then in our own lives), keeps our energy totally consumed with merely trying to ‘keep the car on the road,’ so-to-speak.

This Advent season, we are invited to see the big picture of God's vision as we wait for His future to be completed – while also tending to the immediate path before us.

I knew a man whose eyes did not work together in the way that eyes normally do. When he drove, he said that he depended on one of his eyes to see for distance and with the other eye he saw what was close to him. While most of us don't have this 'ability' (or dis-ability), in a way, I think this is the kind seeing (metaphorically speaking) that would be suited for us as Christians. Ideally, it would be like seeing and experiencing the immediate struggles in life, while **at the same time**, being encouraged by the signs of Christ's *already* coming and already in our world and in our lives.

When Jesus tells the parable about the fig and all the trees sprouting leaves being a sign of summer **already near**, he is affirming that in him, salvation is already a reality. For the struggling and persecuted church of the first century for whom the gospel-writer wrote, even after Jesus' death and resurrection, Christ's nearness and salvation remained a reality. It is the same for us. There are signs all around us (even as we wait for Christ to come again in the fullness of time and glory), that He is already near and present. His coming is not 'future-only' but a present-also event.

I used to think it would be special to wear glasses. As a kid, I liked to try on other people's glasses (if they would let me), and run to the mirror to see how I looked. Of course, I couldn't see very well at **all** how I looked, because those lenses were made especially for the *owner* of the glasses. Not for *me*.

Now that I have my *own* glasses, I'm not nearly as thrilled about having a pair. But I **am** thrilled about how they help me see. Last

week I was given a new prescription and ordered a new type of lense, something called multi-vision, that will help me see three types of distances all in one pair of glasses. I'm looking forward – with the aid of new glasses – to easier recognition as I'm helped to see better.

God places signs for **us** to see and recognize – and gives us the ability to see these signs of his bursting in to our ordinary lives as well as into extraordinary situations.

“God speaks to us in [God’s] own special sign language—a baby. Not much. A small December child. A baby is: birth, beginnings, potential without guarantee. A baby is helpless but not hopeless. A baby is someone to watch. A baby is the future appearing now. Are there baby-signs from God signalling hope to us watchers?” – Robt. A. Raines in *Imaging the Word*, Vol. 1, Kenneth T. Lawrence, Ed. (Cleveland: United Church Press, 1994), p. 78

While we wait for Christ to return, and as we witness and experience his breaking in even now, we don't just sit around watching the clock. Nor are we to be living lives **unworthy** of the One whom we love and serve. Jesus' “nearness and here-ness” is intended to lead us to a different quality of life than before we knew his presence. Not only that, we are to be continually **transformed** into his likeness. Jesus warns us, “Be on guard,” he says, “so that your hearts are not weighed down with carousing and drunkenness or even worries.

Instead, “*Stand up. Be on guard. Be alert.* In other words, fasten your seat belts, open your eyes, and get ready for the ride of your lives. Things, (not just us) are in need of change, and justice is coming. Everything will be set right.” (Mennonite Church Canada Advent worship materials, 2009).

The prophet Jeremiah speaks of the hope of Jerusalem's eventual security and safety to its exiled people 600 years before Jesus' birth.

“Yet, if there is one city that tragically symbolizes the absence of security and safety, surely it is Jerusalem. This is one promise of God’s reign that seems yet to be fulfilled. At the same time, though, when Jeremiah speaks of the coming Branch from the family tree of David who shall enable justice and righteousness to break out in Jerusalem and *all* lands, we Christians rightly think of the Saviour of the world.” [Ben C. Ollenburger, AMBS on-line Advent lectionary commentary]. Jesus, Lord at his birth, is the birth of our hope even as we long and wait for the completion of *all* of God’s promises.

As we circle back to think once more about Jesus’ illustration using the sprouting leaves on the trees, it is helpful to remember when the buds form and grow. They don’t both form and start sprouting all in the same season. Instead, the buds grow during the previous summer and they’re set in the fall, waiting through the cold winter until the warmth of spring wakes them to new life. What looks dead is really pent up life just waiting to break forth!

And so we wait in hope, responding to Christ’s promise recorded in Revelation 22:20, “Surely I am coming soon,” with the affirmation that immediately follows it:

“Amen. Come, Lord Jesus!”