

Advent 1A  
Romans 13:11-14, Matthew 24:36-44  
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## Sanctifying Time

The countdown has begun — only 27 more shopping days until Christmas.

And shopping isn't the only thing keeping us busy this time of year. It's the last few weeks of the school semester, with final tests and projects; plus holiday gatherings to prepare for; gifts to get in the mail; decorating and baking and holiday meal preparation to anticipate; as well as getting ready for families to visit. So much to do and so little time. Time is beyond our capabilities to tame or control.

People view time differently. Ancient people began seeing time as cyclic, as they saw consistencies in the daily return of the sun and moon, and witnessed an enduring cycle of seasons that shaped their lives.

Some see time more linearly, a constant movement forward, more like points on a timeline. No beginning or end, but measurable moments within a never-ending procession of new moments; an endless line unfolding into the future.

Others see time as a spiral, a way to envision how time both moves forward but also circles back on itself. This view recognizes the tension between renewing and returning to what has gone before, another new day or new season, while also moving forward into the future and what is to come. This is how I think of time, as an ever-deepening spiral that gives us an opportunity to grow in our understanding of God and ourselves and our relationships, as time moves steadily forward through the seasons of our lives.

Yes, time march on, but we are not its captive. Instead, we can live into the hope of time, by sanctifying it, marking it, and allowing our life to be shaped by its passing. And our liturgical calendar, with its changing seasons, helps us to live into this hope of time.

Today we begin a new liturgical year. It's the first Sunday of Advent and we mark this new beginning with readings from Year A, the first of our three-year lectionary cycle. We'll be hearing Matthew's voice in our Gospel readings throughout most of the year.

And as we begin Advent, we should recognize that this word means "coming". This liturgical season is about waiting and anticipation, wrapped into two themes: first, waiting to celebrate the joy of that first coming in the birth of Jesus, our Incarnate Lord and Savior, and second, anticipating the second coming, when Christ will return to bring justice, judgment, and peace to the earth.

Our lessons today encompass that second theme, the anticipation of Christ coming again.

Jesus tells the disciples that no one knows when the Messiah will return except the Father — not angels, not even Jesus. So we shouldn't bother wasting any energy speculating about when this will occur, for no one can know.

But we're also warned not to become so obsessed with the our day-to-day lives, that we fail to recognize that in the future, there will be judgement. There will be a reckoning. We're warned not to become so preoccupied with our own daily lives as to be caught off guard, as the people

were in the days of Noah — a careless and unprepared generation who were swept away. Instead, we should prepare for the coming of the Son of Man.

So keep awake. Be faithful, be diligent, take your faith seriously. For that is how we prepare for the unexpected hour.

Now I know this isn't the world's typical pre-Christmas message. It doesn't tie into a shopping day countdown or a frenzy of activities. But Advent reminds us that although we live in the world, we, as Christ-followers, are not of the world.

Instead, we are called to something different. We are called, as Paul encourages us in his letter to the Romans, to put on the Lord Jesus Christ, to clothe ourselves in the Lord.

What does that mean — “to cloth ourselves in the Lord?” How do we live our day-to-day lives in anticipation of Christ coming again? How are we called to use our precious gift of time?

We can begin by being faithful, by sanctifying this season of Advent by setting aside some time for quiet reflection and meditation away from that the world's frantic busy-ness. Find time to spend with God in daily prayer, whether from the Daily Office in the Book of Common prayer or sitting with a daily reflection, like our own Holy Spirit Advent meditation booklet, created by our members. Even spending five minutes a day meditating on God's Word can help to clothe us in the Lord.

Second, we can lift up what we do each day to God by living in awareness that Jesus will return and consciously doing our daily work to God's glory. Whether we're a banker, a student, a teacher, or a homemaker, when we offer up our daily lives to God, we open ourselves to being transformed through the Spirit and discovering new ways to share Christ's light in the world. Each day we're faced with making choices about whether we're going to take one of those quick-and-easy worldly shortcuts — perhaps by glancing at a neighbor's test during an exam, or using the company's office supplies for personal use, or not telling a cashier that they gave us too much change, or failing to speak out when we hear someone being oppressed because of their race, religion, gender, sexuality, or economic status. We're faced with so many choices as go through our day routines. But by being conscious of our Living God as we go live our daily lives. by dealing honestly and fairly with one another, we are diligently living into holy watchfulness.

And finally, we can lean into Jesus' teachings, remembering that Jesus has shown us what it means to love God and love our neighbor. Jesus has shown us that our relationship with God cannot be separated from our relationship with those in need — for to love God fully is to love and care for others. In the very the next chapter of Matthew's gospel, Jesus tells of the time of judgement, when the Messiah will gather all the nations, separating them as a shepherd divides the sheep from the goats. The Messiah identifies those who have fed the hungry, given drink to the thirsty, welcomed the stranger, clothed the naked, cared for the sick, and visited the prisoner. And Jesus assures us that whatever we have done, or not done, for the least of these, we have in fact done for Jesus. During these upcoming weeks, we can insure that we look beyond our own lives and care for others.

How will we, God's beloved people, choose to live during Advent? Can we let go of some of the frenzy of the world and instead live into the hope of waiting for the coming Messiah?

I encourage us all to wisely use our time this Advent, by living more fully into anticipating the Coming Christ:

- Sanctify this time of waiting with daily prayer and regular worship.

- Faithfully offer up our daily work to the Lord, inviting the Holy Spirit to shape our lives.
- Mark this time by caring for others, particularly those in need.

For this is how we clothe ourselves in the Lord, how we use our time to grow into a deeper understanding of God and ourselves and our relationships, as we move steadily through Advent and beyond.

And with God's help, we can put on the armor of light, so that in that day of Christ's return to judge both the living and the dead, we too, through God's grace, may rise to the life immortal.  
*Amen.*