

Advent 1 B
St. Mark 13:24-37
December 3, 2017
St. George's Bolton
Fr. Chris

This is the Time

“Beware, keep alert; for you do not know when the time will come.”

Advent is a season that teaches us about the importance of time. It is the season that begs us to answer the question, ‘What time is it?’

It isn't enough that the daylight is growing shorter until it reaches our holiday in 3 weeks. The days and hours seem to be moving faster, the older you get. Time feels like it is racing by. Just a few days ago it was the end of November and we were celebrating Thanksgiving. Now it is already December 3rd, with only 22 days left until Christmas comes. How shall we spend those precious days?

When you have what appears to be a lot of time, it is easy to procrastinate, and to say, “I have lots of time, I'll do that later.” It is easy to leave many important things to the last minute, but then the risk is that you will not have enough time to get everything done. It is best to prioritize what must be done in life, and tackle that while you can. Advent pushes us to pick our priorities.

What time is it? We ought to know. The time is close. We have had all year to get ready since last Christmas. Some of us have tucked away presents for loved ones during our travels this year. And now the time seems to be short, it really is short. 22 days. We see decorations going up, not only in the marketplace, but also around our homes where the Christmas lights are coming on at our neighbor's homes and maybe even our own. Christmas Carols fill the airwaves on our radios. Christmas movies started airing in November. What time is it? We could ignore the signs and then come up short. The Gospel says, “So also, when you see these things taking place, you know that he is near, at the very gates.” So we have seen these things taking place, yes ever since the Christmas decorations went out at Lowes and Home Depot last September, we witnessed these signs that the holiday is coming. They shout at us, time to get ready. And sometimes we get annoyed, thinking, it's too early. It's not even Halloween yet! But I think the metaphor here is clear. Be prepared. Have a plan about what you need to do, and do it! Don't put off to tomorrow what you can do today, because, tomorrow may never come. Pick your priorities.

Spiritually, we are taught to be Preppers. Get prepared. Be prepared. But be prepared for what? How should I get prepared? Advent and Christmas are like a mini-school in learning to be “Preppers.” They urge us to get ready. They urge us to think of someone else besides ourselves. They call forth generosity, kindness, and yes, that four letter word, love. Christmas is about love, if nothing else. This season we are taught to love. But love is not simply about giving things. That would be too easy. At some level, we know that you can't buy someone's love. So we can't make this season about that. Loving pushes us to open not so much our wallets, but our hearts, to

set aside our inner most fears and anxieties and to love with all our hearts and all our being, with our minds, our bodies, and our spirits. (Where have we heard those words before?)

The sale circulars remind us not to miss the opportunities that the merchants present us. “Time is running out,” says the title on many of my emails. Yes it is, but a more important time is running out. The clock is ticking. Yet I find it so easy to press the snooze button on my clock. It is like getting ready to leave the house, and a voice in the background is prompting me, ‘aren’t you ready yet, come on, it’s time to go! You’re making us late!’ Time is running out. It is late! This offer won’t last forever. Neither will your life. What time is it? Clocks won’t do you much good if you don’t ever look at them or heed the message they speak to us.

There are many things that we treasure in this life, but as I get older, I realize the most precious gift or treasure we have is time. And there is a limited amount of it for each us.

Be awake the Gospel yells at us. Be awake? All I want to do is roll over, pull the covers up and go back to sleep. I want to hit the snooze button on life. I think we all get pretty tired sometimes.

But do we need to be insomniacs to be spiritual people? Some people—many people—sleep through life. They are not fully awake. Some are in a deep sleep, lulled by the droning of all the cogs in the wheel of the workday world machine—of which they are a small, seemingly inconsequential part. Life seems to just go by, one day melting into the next, one week, one month one year doing the same, melting into the very next one. And where does the time go? One day it is Friday, Happy Friday! —TGIF and before you know it, it’s Monday morning again and you start all over. What time is it?

Advent cries at us, what time is it? Advent cries out to us, ‘Sleepers, awake!’ as Bach penned the famous Cantata, ‘Wachet auf, he comes!’ Hymn 61 in our hymnal conveys the urgency to wake up from our deep sleep. This is a hymn for today. Awake! Watch out! Check out the clock! Check out the calendar. Life is finite. How are you spending yours?

What time is it? It’s Christmas time silly rabbit! This is the most special time of the year. We are preparing for Christmas yet to come, a little less than 22 days now. Just 3 weeks away. We are getting ready by doing all of the fun things of the season. We are shopping and wrapping the presents. We are writing the Christmas cards, those of us who still do. We are decorating our homes. We are baking and some of us are busy even making candy. Many are sampling the goodies (like me) to be sure they are as good as we remembered them from last year.

And why do we do it? Do we know? Is it the tradition, you know, like *déjà vu*, trying to relive the memories of Christmas past? Is it because of our own expectations? Is it because of the expectations of someone else? Does it matter why we do it? Maybe it is just because it feels good and warms our hearts, our souls, and lifts us from a soul-less existence as a mere cog in the wheel?

Why do we do it? It is about God. It is about celebrating the time, the night when God came into the world because God loves us. Love came down. God is all about love, and so this season is about love, big time.

Recently, David Cassidy, the pop idol from the 1960's and 70's passed away, a little before his time at age 67. His daughter, Katie Cassidy, who was present when he died, recounted his last words on this earth: "So much wasted time..."

She noted she would keep these words as a daily reminder of the preciousness of our time. She said: "This will be a daily reminder for me to share my gratitude with those I love as to never waste another minute....thank you." So much wasted time! Words we should remember also. They are an Advent warning to us.

I love this season. I love Christmas. Maybe Jesus is the reason for the season. First, Jesus was removed from it. Now Christmas has been removed from the Christmas season. Now it's just the holidays. But what holiday? Imagine completely doing away with Christmas...How would the Carol's go if you take Christmas out of them, "I'm dreaming of a white holiday? I don't think so! What time is it? It is Christmastime! And as Ebenezer Scrooge said in Dickens' Christmas Carol, "I will honor Christmas and try to keep it all the year!" What time is it? "Beware, keep alert; for you do not know when the time will come."

AMEN