

“You Know What Time It Is”  
A Sermon Preached by Frank Mansell III  
John Knox Presbyterian Church – Indianapolis, Indiana  
Advent 1 – December 1, 2013

Isaiah 2: 1-5  
Romans 13: 11-14

Do you have trouble waking up in the morning? For some of us, it can take a couple of alarm clocks to rouse us from our heavy slumber. For others of us, we awake at the same time, all the time, without the help of alarms or family members.

During the summer months, it's usually not a problem to wake up, as the sun greets us early in the day, and our bodies respond to this natural wake-up call. But during these winter months, we're often left to wonder, “Where did the sun go?” It is dark and cold at this time of the year, and our bodies naturally wish to remain under those warm, snuggly covers.

It is no wonder, then, that the image of light in the midst of darkness speaks so vividly to us during the season of Advent. This is a time of waiting, of expecting the light of the world to come into our presence and illumine our lives and wake us up. This is the “darkest” time of the calendar year, when the hours of daylight are the shortest. As the daylight lessens, we light candles in our windows, on wreaths, on our mantles, all of which symbolize the light we pray will enlighten our lives.

What we hear in Isaiah and Paul's letter to the Romans is more than just a call to wait for the light. It is a call to “walk in the light,” to prepare for the coming of God Incarnate with active and deliberate works which signal Christ's presence. It is also more than just light: it is the light and it is the Word, the instruction which accompanies the light. The two go hand-in-hand to help us to better prepare for what God is sending us.

The prophet Isaiah saw a vision of God, but it is not described as only a vision: “The **word** that Isaiah . . . **saw** concerning Judah and Jerusalem.” The word of God was both instruction and a vision, for with the future promise comes the instruction of God's Word. The vision which Isaiah sees depicts a Jerusalem which unites peoples of all types and nationalities. The purpose of this coming-together is “that God may teach us his ways and that we may walk in his paths.” God plans a revelation to the world in Jerusalem, an act which people will both see and hear. For the Israelites who heard the prophet's words, they likely believed he spoke of the coming reign of the Messiah, the one who would restore Israel to its glory of David and Solomon. That was the hope which the people waited expectantly for, amid the darkness of foreign armies and rulers conquering the northern and southern kingdoms.

Yet these texts for the First Sunday of Advent more specifically depict what life will be like not in the Messiah's first coming, but in his Second Coming. Paul's words speak of the advent of the Messiah's second-coming. He urges the Christians in Rome to “wake from their sleep” for it is the time which they have been waiting for. Paul emphasizes how they are to prepare themselves for the Lord's coming: “Let us then lay aside the works of darkness and put on the armor of light.” To walk in darkness means to cause reveling and debauchery,

drunkenness and licentiousness, quarreling and jealousy. To walk in the light means to “live honorably in the day,” while putting on the Lord Jesus Christ as your “armor of light.”

And Isaiah paints a picture of what this day of the Lord will be like. Ruth Meyers describes it in this way: “People are streaming to a holy mountain from every corner of the earth. They carry with them the weapons of war, and as they climb the mountain, they cast swords and spears into the furnace. A blacksmith stands by with a hammer, patiently pounding weapons into tools for cultivation. The din of the forge grows louder, hammer clangs on anvil as more and more people arrive weary of war, drawn by the light, ready for a new day of peace” (*Ruth Meyers, “Live Into Hope”, Christian Century, Nov. 14, 2001, 15*).

That always seems like a pipe dream, doesn’t it? We watch the evening news, and we become numb to the continuous reports of shootings and acts of violence in our city. We believe such visions of peace and light are unattainable, so why bother. And yet that is the message of Advent, of Isaiah and Paul, of the kingdom of God. How do we, as Christians, promote and live into this hope of peace?

I believe it first begins with being peacemakers. I’m not talking about something as major as negotiating a peace between two warring parties or nations. But there are smaller, more practical ways we as the church can be peacemakers in the spirit of Advent.

We can show in our worship, our fellowship, and our service that we welcome all who wish to know God more fully, and we will not discriminate against anyone. We can model to the world in our struggles and debates that we will be civil, respectful, and always mindful of the love we embody for one another in Jesus Christ. For instance, I wonder when we disagree about something in the church, do we realize that our children are watching? If we want the church to be a part of our children’s future, we should model healthy behavior to them when we struggle over issues, instead of acting like children who don’t get their way. The time is now to wake from our slumber of comfort and self-centeredness, and prepare for the Lord’s arrival by putting on the armor of light.

I return again to the thoughts of Ruth Meyers regarding this challenge for us as peacemakers: “In our world violence is never far away – it’s in our own households, our communities and certainly in the nations of the world. My efforts to be a peacemaker often seems futile. Who am I in the face of such powerful forces? Even if I join other peacemakers, how can we possibly make a difference?

“Advent invites us to live in hope and not in despair, for our hope rests on a sure foundation: Jesus Christ. The violent death of Jesus on the cross was not the end, for in Jesus’ resurrection we are assured of new life. Violence will not have the last word. We look toward the holy mountain, where weapons of war are hammered into tools” (*ibid*).

As we begin our time of waiting for the light of the world to come into our lives once again, live into the hope that the darkness will not have the last word. Be the instruments of peace God wishes us to be to our fellow brother and sister. “You know what time it is, how it is now the moment for you to wake from sleep.” May our waiting not be passive, but active as we awake to seek Christ coming to rule this world with power and might. Thanks be to God. Amen.