

## **Isaiah 2:1-5**

**2**The word that Isaiah son of Amoz saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem. <sup>2</sup>In days to come the mountain of the Lord's house shall be established as the highest of the mountains, and shall be raised above the hills; all the nations shall stream to it. <sup>3</sup>Many peoples shall come and say, "Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob; that he may teach us his ways and that we may walk in his paths." For out of Zion shall go forth instruction, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem. <sup>4</sup>He shall judge between the nations, and shall arbitrate for many peoples; they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more. <sup>5</sup>O house of Jacob, come, let us walk in the light of the LORD!

## **Matthew 24:36-44**

<sup>36</sup>But about that day and hour no one knows, neither the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. <sup>37</sup>For as the days of Noah were, so will be the coming of the Son of Man. <sup>38</sup>For as in those days before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day Noah entered the ark, <sup>39</sup>and they knew nothing until the flood came and swept them all away, so too will be the coming of the Son of Man. <sup>40</sup>Then two will be in the field; one will be taken and one will be left. <sup>41</sup>Two women will be grinding meal together; one will be taken and one will be left. <sup>42</sup>Keep awake therefore, for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming. <sup>43</sup>But understand this: if the owner of the house had known in what part of the night the thief was coming, he would have stayed awake and would not have let his house be broken into. <sup>44</sup>Therefore you also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an unexpected hour.

A young father is shopping in a grocery store with his 3 year old son. As he gathers the items needed for his family, his little boy is fascinated by all the moveable and singing Santas in the store. He presses the button on each one, methodically so that they all begin to sing at once! The father calmly says “Hold on to yourself, Tommy. Hold on to yourself, Tommy.” The father gently guides his son to the cash register. “Hold on to yourself, Tommy.” The clerk at the cash register is just amazed at this young father and she can’t help but say: “Sir, I’ve noticed how calm you are. Here your son is running about and you are calmly saying to him “Hold on to yourself, Tommy.” The father says: “What makes you think my son’s name is Tommy? I’m talking to myself!”

Look at the time! It’s December 2<sup>nd</sup>. There are 23 shopping days left until Christmas! The stores have been decorated for weeks now. Radio stations have begun to play Christmas carols. It takes me two hands to pick up the Sunday paper and carry it into my house because it is so heavy with advertisements. A little over a week ago we had Black Friday. This is the day that the most shopping ever is doing in the United States. The retail industry depends on this particular season to turn a profit. Now we also have Cyber Monday. Cyber Monday is the day people get back to work after the big shopping weekend, having not found what they really wanted, they sit in front of their computers at work or at home, and shop on line for what they are looking for. At my house there is a lot of pressure to get things done early because I have to mail a Christmas package to Germany where my daughter is an exchange student. My worst nightmare as a parent is Christmas morning arrives and the package is not yet there! Families are making travel plans and trying to negotiate between seeing one side of the extended family and also paying attention to the other side of the extended family. And the expectations that are placed upon us and that we place upon ourselves are enormous.

Look at the time! It is December 2<sup>nd</sup>. And in the church calendar it is New Year’s Day as we begin a new liturgical year. In the church calendar we mark out the time as we re-live the history of God’s salvation for us. We begin with Advent, a time of anticipation, expectation and preparation before the Christmas season, and move through the whole church calendar. It is Advent in the church. The texts of scripture speak to us. In Isaiah there is a vision of peace that our world does not yet know. It is a vision of peace in which swords are made into plowshares, a vision of peace in which all the nations come to the mountain of God. In the New Testament, Jesus speaks of a time when the Son of Man will return and no one knows the hour or the day when this will occur. In the church it is Advent, a season of expectation, anticipation and preparation as we think about the timing of God’s world and anticipate the day when the vision of peace will be a reality.

The timing is off! Can you feel how out of sync it is? Between the world rushing toward a Christmas of consumerism and materialism and unrealistic expectations and God’s timing, in Advent, when we anticipate the celebration of the birth of the Savior in a manger in Bethelhem. God’s timing, in which we watch and prepare and expect God’s appearance to us. Can you feel the timing is off and out of sync?

In our world people are hurting. There is a war in Iraq. There is death and destruction daily. There are families separated from one another across thousands of miles. There

are injured soldiers coming home. There are soldiers separated from families, some who have not seen children born to them. In our world there is poverty. In our city there is homelessness. There are people who are hurting as they anticipate the holidays and feel lonely or remember the anniversary of a death or difficulty. The holidays become a painful time. There are people in our world who can sense that the timing is off and don't really understand quite why it is that they feel empty inside as they look out on to a sparkly, consumer Christmas world.

Look at the time! It is Sunday morning when we gather together. We gather together on Sunday morning to remember that God's timing is not the world's timing. We gather together to worship to remember who we are and to remember whose we are. We gather together to affirm that we know that God's timing will eventually bring that vision of peace that Isaiah describes. We gather together to affirm that one day the Son of Man will return. We do not know the day or the hour but we know that our future and the future of the world is in God's hands. We gather together on Sunday morning to affirm that we trust in God's timing and not the world's timing.

You know this. As a congregation we spend the season of Advent making preparations to show God's grace to families with a parent in prison. You know this, for we spend the season of Advent gathering presents for children who live in inner city Newark. You know this, for there are many, many ways in which we spread the grace of God and the message of God's love in our community and around the world.

Now is the time! For even though that we know the future is in God's hands, God is also present with us in this moment and at this time. Because we trust that the future is God's, we can live in the present moment as God's children. We can reach out into our world and find those who are lonely and hurting and welcome them in to this place of nurture and care and compassion. Because we know who we are and whose we are we can step away from the Christmas rush of our culture and remember what is truly important and relax and know that God holds us. Rather than feel the expectations of our family and culture we can live out of God's promise to us.

Friends, now is the time for us to come to the table of God and be nurtured. Now is the time for us to affirm that we trust in God's timing. Amen.