

Fourth Sunday of Advent
Wicker Park Lutheran Church
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December 1, 2019

The gospel reading that we have heard today is a very interesting passage as it has been interpreted in different ways in many traditions, denominations, and countries. In my childhood, I was perplexed by this passage which has been often interpreted as rapture and the second coming of Jesus. I still remember that I thought so much and worried what would I do if my mother or father or sister suddenly vanish, and I am left alone in this world. In many parts of the world, among the Christians, the church focuses more on the nearing of the end of the days, rapture, and second coming of Jesus and uses them as a tool to keep the people in fear and terror.

However, this passage is not about the end of the days. It is not about the “second coming of Jesus” because the Greek word Parousia has been misunderstood and misinterpreted as second coming. The word Parousia means “coming,” or “the active presence;” it is not a one-time event of coming again but a process of how Christ comes and keeps coming and is present in our lives through our experiences. It refers to the active presence of Christ in our lives, actions and relationships to our fellow human beings and creation. It makes much sense as we are in the season of advent. Advent is a time to prepare ourselves. But what are we preparing ourselves for? Is it just for celebrating Christmas that all ends in a day with fun, celebration and food? No. We are called to be prepared, to prepare ourselves for the reign of God that is filled with love, peace and justice.

Most of the passages that were read today talk about time, day and hour. The Old Testament passage reads as, “in days to come.” In the second reading, we heard, “the day is near” and in the gospel reading, “that day and hour no one knows.” Which day are we talking about? Do we know when it is? The uniqueness is that no one knows when that day is. We do not have a date to mark our calendars. It is the eschatological hope that someday, which the father alone knows, where the whole creation would realize peace and happiness. It is fulfillment of hope that would enable us to imagine life in fullness. We live with such hope that urges us to be ambassadors of peace and justice. The coming of Christ or Parousia is the breaking in of Christ into our lives and communities through the unexpected and underestimated. Sadly, some churches and Christians focus on knowing when it is rather than even predicting the end of the world to instill fear rather than preparing the people and the world for the Kairos moment of God’s reign. The time of Advent reminds us to be in continuous preparation for God’s reign. It is not what is going to happen on that day which is unknown, but how we live, transforming the lives of others and allowing others to transform us until that day. The readings for today give us two imperatives to lead us in that preparation: 1. Wake up from sleep. 2. Walk in the light.

1. Wake up from sleep

In Romans, Paul calls the church to wake up from sleep. It is a hard thing for many, especially me, to wake up from sleep. There have been times when I sleep in the afternoon and get up, and it would be about 6 and the sun would have gone down which would make me confused whether it is morning or evening. It takes a few minutes to ponder and figure out what time it is and the time I slept. Waking up from

sleep requires not to understand the future but to understand the present. Waking up means being watchful, alert, and attentive.

We live in a world that calls us to be awake to the needs of the others. We must be attentive and with open ears to the people who want to be listened. We live in a situation where we hardly have time to speak to our neighbors or the people who needs us the most. We do live in busy times and have busy schedules. We need to be reminded that we need to be woken up from the mode of individualism to an active living as a community. We need to watch out if we, unknowingly, hurt others with attitudes and beliefs that promote racism, sexism and so on. We live in a situation where children go to sleep with hunger and people live on the streets. Still, we have difficulties in accepting the immigrants. We still hinder the lives of people with our opinions on sexuality. While these issues are reality in this country and in many parts of the world, we tend to sleep shutting our eyes and ears to the cries of the people. It is time to wake up so that we know what time it is now. It is important to watch out for what is happening around us because we do not know when “that day” is.

The gospel gives three examples: 1. Time of Noah 2. Two men working in the field and two women grinding meal where one is taken and the other is left, and 3. A house owner who was robbed. All three cases represent the regular lives of the people – eating, drinking and marrying; working in the fields and grinding meal; and owning a house. The gospel writer Matthew talks about the time not in the sense of the nearness but in the sense of watchfulness. People are not aware of the time and that is the reason, watchfulness and being awake is necessary. Even though the example of robbery seems to be a negative one, it is used to explain the unexpected coming of Christ. In the same way, Christ breaking into our lives is also an expression of God’s

intervention into our lives. It is time to seek God's intervention rather than focusing on reckoning the control of the time. It is important that we are awake, alert and watchful to accept the Parousia and intervention of Christ.

2. Walk in the light

Secondly, in order to be prepared, we are called to walk in the light of Christ. Paul exhorts his audience to put on the armor of light and be clothed with Christ followed by waking up from sleep. Putting on Christ is to show and reflect Christ in our lives. In order to allow Christ's coming into our lives as an everyday experience, we are called to put on Christ and walk in the light of the Lord.

The Isaiahic prophecy also calls the people, "come, let us walk in the light of the LORD!" Isaiah describes God not as a king or ruler, but as a teacher, judge and arbitrator. The prophet calls the people to the mountain of Yahweh so that he may teach the ways and in turn the people would walk in his ways. The prophet also explains what is it to walk in the ways of the Lord. It is not about breaking the swords and spears into ruins, but to turn them into plowshares and pruning hooks. Here is a great call to transformation rather than destruction. To walk in the ways and light of the Lord expects us to be creative agents of transformation and not of destruction. Hope becomes the foundational energy for making this transformation possible. Yes, we do live in a world where hatred towards one another is increasing. This advent calls us to prepare ourselves to instill love, hope and be agents of transformation.

We live in a world where each and every one of us wants to control our own lives which is very different from the context I come from. On one side, where we are

striving towards liberty and freedom which is important in one way, while there is also a danger whether we are losing the values of togetherness, connectedness and being responsible for one another. The danger of extreme individualism among the present generation with the growing technologies and social media becomes a threat to being a community. It is important to ponder on how we could bring a balance on our individuality and also being a community. This balance is possible when we let God's intervention into our lives. We need courage to be open to even let someone intrude on our lives and to be transformed. Because Christ's Parousia is nothing about breaking into our lives.

Parousia (the coming or the active presence of Christ) is not a future event which may happen at the end times. Many a time, we tend to think so and are reluctant to the things we ought to do. But, as responsible people of faith, our attitude towards Parousia should not be a final or end time event. Christ breaks into every one of our lives, through the people we meet, the table we share, the kiss of a child and the tears of our friends that we wipe. Parousia of Christ is a daily process, which happen every day in our lives. Christ breaks into our life in each and every aspect we experience, both joys and struggles.

We do not know the exact date of "that day" when this earth will turn completely to be a place of peace, justice and belongingness with the kingdom values of Christ as a reality. If we sleep until that moment, we would never raise up to that particular day. God has entrusted us to be the agents to make it possible. This advent calls us to be awake and walk in the light of God, clothed with Christ so that we would be the agents of that glorious vision: 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 anymore. What a glorious vision!

Amen.