

Delivered at Plymouth Church of Shaker Heights, U.C.C.

“Awaken to a Christian Sense of Time”

Isaiah 2:1-5

²The word that Isaiah son of Amoz saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem.

²In 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.

³ 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 God may teach us God's ways
and that we may walk in God's paths.'

For out of Zion shall go forth instruction,
and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem.

⁴God shall judge between the nations,
and shall arbitrate for many peoples;
they shall beat their swords into ploughshares,
and their spears into pruning-hooks;
nation shall not lift up sword against nation,
neither shall they learn war any more.

⁵O house of Jacob,
come, let us walk
in the light of the Lord!

Romans 13: 8-14

⁸ Owe no one anything, except to love one another; for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law. ⁹The commandments, 'You shall not commit adultery; You shall not murder; You shall not steal; You shall not covet'; and any other commandment, are summed up in this word, 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' ¹⁰Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore, love is the fulfilling of the law.

11 Besides this, you know what time it is, how it is now the moment for you to wake from sleep. For salvation is nearer to us now than when we became believers; ¹²the night is far gone, the day is near. Let us then lay aside the works of darkness and put on the amour of light; ¹³let us live honorably as in the day, not in reveling and drunkenness, not in debauchery and licentiousness, not in quarrelling and jealousy. ¹⁴Instead, put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires.

The Gospel according to Matthew is believed to have been written after the Gospel of Mark. For all but 60 verses of Mark appear in Matthew. It is believed to have been written in Galilee or Antioch in Syria. It was in Galilee that followers of a Pharisaic party and early Jewish followers of Jesus would have interacted and clashed. The occasionally highly charged language is best understood within the inter-Jewish conflict. The Gospel of Matthew highlights the Jewish origin and identity of Jesus and his first followers more than any other piece of early Christian literature.

This mornings' passage is found in the two chapters comprising "the eschatological discourse, the fifth and final major teaching section in the Gospel of Matthew. Jesus announces signs of his return and the future establishment of God's empire victorious over all, including Rome. In the meantime, the present is a time of tribulation for disciples. It requires faithfulness, non-violent resistance, and hopeful anticipation. Ironically and regrettably, the chapters depict God's future purposes by employing symbols from the imperial world that the Gospel resists!" [NIB NRSV 2003]

Matthew 24: 36-44

³⁵Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.

36 'But about that day and hour no one knows, neither the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. ³⁷For as the days of Noah were, so will be the coming of the Son of Man. ³⁸For as in those days before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day Noah entered the ark, ³⁹and they knew nothing until the flood came and swept them all away, so too will be the coming of the Son of Man. ⁴⁰Then two will be in the field; one will be taken and one will be left. ⁴¹Two women will be grinding meal together; one will be taken and one will be left. ⁴²Keep awake therefore, for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming. ⁴³But 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. ⁴⁴Therefore you also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an unexpected hour.

May the words of my mouth, and the meditations of all our hearts,

Be acceptable to you O God, our Rock and our Redeemer. Amen.

Awaken to a Christian sense of time. Advent is not merely a preparation for the observance of Christmas Day, the birth of Jesus. Advent is a season of its own, a season to awaken us to God's purposes in our lives and the world, and to hold before us the fulfillment of time in the reign of God. Our texts for this first Sunday of Advent point us to the time when history will unfold into the eternal reign of God, when the false reality of chronos time or secular time, will give way to kairos time or divine time.

Chronos is cold, unfeeling, to be cheated. Kairos is in the light of life, palpable, essential, within all creation. Chronos is barren, ever giving way to decay. Kairos is pregnant with new life and divine possibility. Secular time gives forth a culture ruled by judgment, divisions, abuse of power, an ethos of scarcity, and limited resources. Christian time gives forth a culture of non-judgment, unity in diversity, equality, a spirituality of abundance, and enough for all.

The image that the prophet Isaiah sees in a vision and shares with us, is a world ruled by kairos. God's mountain shall be the highest in all creation and people of all nations shall come to learn the way of justice and peace. All shall learn to live in God's time. God sits as teacher and judge of all the nations of creation. God is not presented here as a judge in the sense of determining guilt or innocence and handing out punishment. Rather God is seen as divine judge, the one who settles disputes among nations, resolving their difficulties so that peace can be established and maintained. The world shifts from nationalism and conflict to peace and unity. The nations take resources currently used for weapons and instead invest in tools for planting and harvesting food. This presents a universal vision resulting in a change from a war economy to a sustainable agricultural economy. And the ones who are supposed to start the transformation are those who already live in the presence of God. Israel and through Jesus, we as Christians, are admonished to take the first steps on the path that all the nations will one day tread.

Hold the image presented by Isaiah, up to the image of the United States. Are we a nation ruled by kairos or chronos? We may have been founded out of a Christian sense of time, but we quickly became ruled by chronos. Democracy may be the best way we know to foster justice, but capitalism consistently gives way to greed and selfishness and the corruption of individuals and nations.

Yesterday was World AIDS day, but I doubt many of you heard a single mention of it. AIDS is an international pandemic. When this nation had an opportunity to change the path of this disease, Reagan refused to even say the word AIDS in any public address for seven years. Had political and religious leaders moved quickly at the beginning they may have all but halted the progress of the virus in our nation and accelerated the search for a treatment or cure.

To this day there are over 40,000 new infections each year in the US alone. Throughout the world in 2007 an estimated 5,800 adults were newly infected with HIV each day. Almost 50% of those infected were women, mostly in low and middle income countries. A small fraction of these people will ever get the medication and medical care they need. Yet today we live in a country that could take just half a day of the money being spent on the war in Iraq and provide access to HIV medications to all those who need it in the U.S. for a solid year, rather than sitting by and watching HIV-positive Americans die on the waiting lists. Chronos time says, this is someone else's problem, use someone else's resources. Straight people say it's a gay problem. White people say it's a black problem. American's say it's Africa's problem, and so on and so on and so on. God isn't in one of these statements. Kairos time says, this is our problem, because the body of Christ has AIDS. Regardless of religion, ethnicity, nation, gender, sexual orientation all humanity are our brothers and sisters.

We have the resources that no one need go without proper medication and health care. And this is true with regard to hunger and homelessness as well. We have the resource that no one in the world needs to be hungry or homeless.

3b'Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord,
to the house of the God of Jacob;
that God may teach us God's ways
and that we may walk in God's paths.'
....⁴God shall judge between the nations,
and shall arbitrate for many peoples;
they shall beat their swords into ploughshares,
and their spears into pruning-hooks;
nation shall not lift up sword against nation,
neither shall they learn war any more. [Isaiah 2]

As Christians we are able to live into this reality through love. Not eros or sensual romantic love, which is primarily self-pleasing. Rather agape which is love desiring the well-being of the other. Such love is about mutuality, equity, kindness and compassion, it is not a feeling but a concrete good.

8 Owe no one anything, except to love one another; for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law. ⁹The commandments, 'You shall not commit adultery; You shall not murder; You shall not steal; You shall not covet';

you shall not make exorbitant profits for much needed medications and medical services,

and any other commandment, are summed up in this word, 'Love your neighbor as yourself.'

¹⁰Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore, love is the fulfilling of the law. [Romans 13]

Awaken to a Christian Sense of Time.

A New Age is dawning. The true Christian sense of time says that it is already here and we are to live accordingly. We are not supposed to merely wait for Jesus to come back we are to “be” the transformation here and now. The image of the reign of God is not just a nice idea, it is Truth and history is unfolding into it. Divine possibility is present in each moment, each cell, each fiber of our being. The reign of God is present yet not consummated. It awaits its unfolding in and through us.

The Eucharistic meal set before us exists in kairos – divine time and not in chronos. It is meant to awaken us to the love of God, and empower us to usher in the reign of God. Every time we take of the bread and the juice at this table, we have the choice of taking the elements in secular time, as mere bits of bread and a sip of juice. Or to take the elements in divine time, and allow ourselves to ingest eternal love itself and in so doing begin to be transformed and opened to the New Age that is dawning.

Don't remain asleep to God's reign this Advent season. Awaken to a Christian sense of time. The time is now. Let love be your law and your guide.

Amen.