

The Day Is Near
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First Lesson: Romans 13:11-14

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 armor 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.

Second Lesson: Matthew 24:36-44

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.

The night is far gone, the day is near! Keep awake therefore, for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming. You must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an unexpected hour. As we enter Advent, awaiting the coming of Christ the newborn king, we also remember that Christ is coming again. Not only are we in the Advent of this church year, we are in an undefined Advent, a time of coming whose end we do not know. We speak of this theologically as “already and not yet.” On Christmas day we will speak of Christ having come and not yet here. We think we know the time of Christ’s arrival, December 25 on our calendar, and we do, but we also don’t. We don’t know when the second coming will be, and, according to Matthew, neither does Christ, and we also don’t know when Christ will appear in our daily lives. Think of Christ’s words – just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.¹

So how do we know and not know? In Greek there are two words for time, *kronos* and *kairos*. We know *kronos* time in our day-to-day lives; it is the measurable time, sequential with every minute, hour, and day. It is the time we register when we know how many days until winter break, how many days until Christmas, how many days until the ones we love come home. *Kairos* time is related but not the same. *Kairos* is immeasurable. It is the *je ne sais quoi* of time. Merriam-Webster defines it as “a

¹ Matthew 25:40.

time when conditions are right for the accomplishment of a crucial action: the opportune and decisive moment.”² It is the “I’ll know it when I see it” version of time. The day is near – we do not know on what day the Lord is coming – for the Son of Man is coming at an unexpected hour.

Blogger Gregg Hake, in speaking on the differences between kronos and kairos and the fullness of kairos time writes:

I am convinced that life is meant to be filled with such moments. We are not here to bide out [sp? – our] time until the bitter end, to march through the minutes, days and years with our heads down and our spirits low, rather, we are here to bring the spark of life to bear upon the tinder of the world around us. If we are living correctly, we are motivating, compelling, entreating and assisting the world around us to rise up and refine. Every thought, word and deed can be harnessed to this aim and it can be done without sacrificing the joy of living.³

Professor William R. Herzog II explains the balance of the two times this way: “Daily work in the field and in the courtyard is necessary to maintain life, but one must always peer through the ordinary days to discern the coming of that extraordinary day.”⁴

In our reading from Matthew, we are given the examples of two pairs of people, one from each being taken up and one left behind. The work of these pairs is what Herzog speaks of. Jesus does not explain explicitly why one was taken up and one was left behind but we can pull from the context around to understand Herzog. In the days of Noah, people were eating and drinking like on any normal day, they were making plans for the future by marrying, as if nothing out of the ordinary could happen. The owner of the house was sleeping as if nothing out of the ordinary could happen. Likely then, one member of each duo was behaving as if nothing out of the ordinary could happen.

In the midst of our ordinary kronos days, an extraordinary kairos event could happen. Keep awake! Hear again these words from Gregg Hake: “We are not here to bide our time until the bitter end, to march through the minutes, days and years with our heads down and our spirits low, rather, we are here to bring the spark of life to bear upon the tinder of the world around us. If we are living correctly, we are motivating, compelling, entreating and assisting the world around us to rise up and refine.” Paul says it this way in Romans: “let us live honorably as in the day, not in reveling and drunkenness, not in debauchery and licentiousness, not in quarreling and jealousy.”

One of the common themes of our faith is that of Christ being the light. We read it in the gospel of John where Jesus says: “I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness but will have the light of life.”⁵ We read it in the beginning of the gospel of John when John writes of

² <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/kairos>.

³ <http://gregghake.com/2011/10/kronos-and-kairos/>.

⁴ *Feasting on the Word: Year A, Volume 1*, p. 25.

⁵ John 8:12.

Christ: “What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people.”⁶ Paul writes: “Let us then lay aside the works of darkness and put on the armor of light.” All of this talk of light and darkness, day and night, is central to our understanding of how Christ has changed our lives. This language gets used a lot around Advent, for the change in our lives began in Christ’s coming as one of us.

We read the “day is near.” The light is near. The coming of Christ, who is light, is near. In anticipation of Christ’s return, we are urged to remember how our lives have been changed and live accordingly, not falling back to the ways of darkness, as if we had never seen or felt the light of Christ, as if we had not received the hope in Christ. Having pulled my fair share of all-nighters / very late nights in college, in seminary, at lock-ins, in life, I can understand the tangible effects of the darkness. For me, in the middle of the night, in the darkness, I hear things and suspect the worst. In the darkness, I think my worst thoughts of myself, I lose rationality. In the light, though, those same sounds have reasonable explanations. In the light, I see the flaws in the “logic” which birthed my thoughts. It is this kind of darkness which we are freed to leave behind, the things we fear, the feelings of worthlessness, because the light of Christ has come to reveal flawed thinking and to shine light on the good that is real. With Christ there is nothing to fear. Through Christ in creation, we have all been created and our very created selves have been declared very good.

If we let this light in, the darkness which keeps us in ourselves, keeps us to ourselves, is lessened and we are freed to bring the spark of life to the world. We are part of the world’s rising up and refinement. Because Christ has come, we know that something out of the ordinary has happened and can happen at any time. Because Christ has come, and is coming, we dare not live our daily lives in a stupor, merely biding our time, for if we do, we might be caught off guard when Christ comes. Because Christ has come, and is coming, keep awake, live honorably for the day is near!

Let us pray: Let us walk in the light of the Lord. Amen.

⁶ John 1:3b-4.