

Be Prepared!

Isaiah 21:1-5, Romans 13:11-14, Matthew 24: 36-44

Nov. 28, 2004

On Friday, here in this very place, I performed a renewal of vows for a young couple. They were married in April in Washington State, but none of her family could come to the wedding. It was very important for her to share her commitment and her joy with her family. So she and her husband decided to come here and have another ceremony so her family could rejoice with them. And since her grandmother and her mother and her uncles and aunts grew up in this church, she wanted to have it here.

It was a very special time, and, coming right after Thanksgiving, it was just the right time. It was a time they'd dreamed about and planned for and prepared for. In the Greek language it would be called a *kairos* moment. A *kairos* time is special time.

It's when the time is ripe--the opportune time. It is contrasted with *chronos* time--*Chronos* time is clock time, ordinary time, the day-to-day plodding on of time. My young couple knew that this was a *kairos* moment, but there were other *kairos* moments that they and we have that go unrecognized. For instance, the moment they met was a *kairos* moment, but they didn't know it. And, in a sense they'd been preparing for that moment all their lives, but I don't know how aware they were of that preparation.

This is what the writers of the scripture we read this morning are talking about--all of them--*kairos* time, the opportune time, the time that is coming. For Isaiah it's described as the time when all the nations will come to worship God--a time of peace, when swords are beaten into plowshares and spears into pruning hooks. Matthew talks about the time when the Son of Man comes in his glory,

and Paul pictures it as the glorious dawning of a new day.

But will we recognize the time when it comes? Will we be like the couple planning their service, prepared and dressed in our new clothes, or will we be like the couple on the day they first met, completely unaware of the significance of the time? Matthew tells us that we won't know the time, not even the Son of Man knows the time. He says--only the father knows. And he gives us the example of Noah. Imagine Noah's friends and acquaintances, going about their business, getting up every morning, having breakfast, doing their work, passing crazy Noah who is busy building a boat, even though he's miles and miles from the sea. They're completely unaware that a kairos moment is approaching. They're unaware until the rain starts to fall. And then it's too late.

Think of Mary and Joseph making their simple preparations for Jesus' birth. Think of all the people living in Nazareth and Bethlehem, and Jerusalem and Rome, for that matter, who were going about their business, getting up every morning, having breakfast, doing their work. They're completely unaware that a kairos moment is approaching. They're unaware, most of them, that the very Son of God is born in a stable and that history is changed forever.

O.K., so we won't know the time. How then can we prepare for it? Certainly not by trying to second-guess God and make predictions about the time. And not by speculating about the nature of the events God has planned for us. Novels about being left behind may make good stories, but it's very important for us to remember that they're fiction, and that they're more entertaining than edifying. It's enough for us to know that it is a time when God's peace and God's justice and God's love will become a reality for us. In the musical *West Side Story*, the hero sings, "Something's coming, don't know what it is, but it's gonna be great!" That should be our attitude.

Paul is the one who gives us some practical and helpful advice. Perhaps we shouldn't be surprised by this, because Paul's words come after the resurrection. The resurrection changes things; with the resurrection the power of sin to control and corrupt has been defeated. But not everyone knows or accepts that yet. When Jonas Salk discovered his vaccine, it was the death-knell for polio, but there was still the task of inoculating everyone. So it is with Christ--Christ is our cure, our healer, but the world hasn't yet accepted that. But this is an imperfect analogy--the inoculations depend on us, and, in a sense telling others about Christ depends on us, but the coming of Christ, the reign of God, doesn't depend on us, any more than the sunrise does. And yet, and yet, we're called not only wake up and enjoy the sunrise, we're called to reflect the light in our faces, and to wake others up to enjoy the view. God's peace and God's justice will come. Paul says Jesus has become our peace, breaking down the walls that divide us. And yet, and yet, we need to accept and live that peace, and to extend our hands across that broken down wall.

So Paul tells us we are living in an in between time--the time between first light and the bright, beautiful glorious dawn. We are the ones who should recognize this, we are the ones who should wake up and prepare for the sunrise, prepare for the day.

Sometimes when my husband Joe and I take a trip, we have to catch an early plane. Sometimes we get up just at first light. Our bags are packed and we put them in the car and drive to the airport just as the sun is rising. What a happy time, what anticipation! That's what Paul is talking about. And we prepare by giving up the deeds of darkness: getting drunk, using drugs, misuse or abuse of sex. Now I can hear you saying to yourself, well I don't do those things.

Unfortunately for us, Paul doesn't stop there. You have to give up quarreling and jealousy, he says. Oops, he has most of us there! We're not only to put those things aside, we're to put on the Lord Jesus Christ. To me that means we are to

make Christ Lord of our lives, to turn our lives over to him and to try to show his love in everything we do.

Let me tell you about a man who needed to wake up. St. Augustine lived a life focused on fulfilling his insatiable sexual desires. Nothing seemed to curb his appetites. Even while he began studying about Christ he would cry out "Lord, grant me chastity, just not yet." One day Augustine was sitting in a garden holding the Bible. And he heard some children behind a hedge playing a game. Just as our children might yell, "Here I come ready or not," the words of the game were "Take and read, take and read." And Augustine opened the Bible and read these verses from Romans. From that moment he put aside all his old ways and put on Christ, and he was changed forever. Let us decide today to allow the light of Christ into our hearts so that His Hope will guide us into a glorious tomorrow, living an honorable life worthy of His love.