

Good News or Bad News?

Advent A1- hope

Isa 2: 1-5, Mt 24: 36-44

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Rev. Donna Vuilleumier

Isa 2: 1-5

The word that Isaiah son of Amoz saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem. 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. 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. 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. O house of Jacob, come, let us walk in the light of the Lord!

Mt 24: 36-44

"But about that day and hour no one knows, neither the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. For as the days of Noah were, so will be the coming of the Son of Man. 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, and they knew nothing until the flood came and swept them all away, so too will be the coming of the Son of Man. Then two will be in the field; one will be taken and one will be left. Two women will be grinding meal together; one will be taken and one will be left. Keep awake therefore, for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming. 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. Therefore you also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an unexpected hour.

Now that the nighttime comes earlier, the air is colder, and the wind blows sharper, stronger, it is time to start adding on. We add on layers of clothing, heavy sweaters, hats and mittens, and flannel pajamas. We add heavy wool blankets on the bed, and more logs in the fire. We add dry gas to the gas tank, and more cans of soup into our pantries. We add more light into the house, as well as outside, trying to keep the dark and the cold at bay even a tiny bit.

The holidays have us adding on as well. We add more events to our calendars, more family and friends into our lives, more food on our tables, and more items onto our credit cards. We add on plans to see our favorite Christmas movies, add to our community and charity giving, and decorations to our homes. In the dark and cold of these days, we want to add in light and joy.

Yet as faithful Christians we know that we are also in a time of waiting, that the true joy of the season is not yet ours. Our Scripture readings are ominous, repentant and apocalyptic. We want to add on delight and wonder yet we find ourselves adding on the sackcloth and ashes of the Lenten penitent. We have a journey to make as a decree has gone out in these taxing times; so pregnant with anticipation we huddle together on toward Bethlehem. In spite of the music, lights, wrappings and trimmings, we are called to embrace the cold, silent somberness of Advent

before we can put on the gifts and golden glow of Christmas. Faith calls us to add on solemnity just as everyone else is putting on the most festive display of the year.

A prophet speaks to us, offering us an ideal future, a future that God wants for humanity. Jesus tells us to be prepared, hopeful, and watching for that future.

Advent holds us from rushing ahead to the party, Advent holds us up to see that hope, peace, love, joy, forgiveness, redemption and renewal are possible in this world; that the birth of Jesus Christ will shine light into the cracks of brokenness. In Advent we hold that darkness, seeing and recognizing it. In the midst of our ordinary, daily lives, in the midst of eating, drinking, and celebrating, Jesus will come, and we are to be ready.

In time to come war will be no more, former weapons will become tools of agriculture to feed the world, lethal weapons will become garden tools to grow enough food for all to eat. Leaders whose power is vested in deceit, fraud, and corruption will be overturned and judged.

For those who wait in the darkness, this is indeed good news. For those who wield these weapons, this shall be bad news.

This sense of waiting, anticipation, not knowing, yet being prepared, sounds like bad news, yet it is good news. It reminds us that the kingdom of heaven is everywhere, breaking in in so many ways, in unexpected places, and at unexpected times. When we have added on distress, anxiety, debts, illness, worry, deadlines and distractions, Advent reminds us that darkness does not have a hold on us.

Rushing through Advent without this attention, this focus, means we will not be inwardly ready for Christmas. We will merely put tinsel and garland over the dark, hollow, shadowy places in our lives; we will not be prepared for the light that is coming to dispel that darkness. The Advent journey to Bethlehem offers a truly joyful, truly meaningful celebration of the light of Christ in our lives, one small candle at a time.

Advent allows us to bear witness to a side of Jesus we tend not to think about. Jesus is our great moral, ethical, teacher. Jesus is the spiritual guide who leads us to live the best ways that we can. Jesus is our savior, our redeemer, the giver of eternal life.

The side of Jesus, the aspect of Jesus, that our faith tradition just rarely focuses on is the apocalyptic Jesus. "But about that day and hour no one knows, neither the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. For as the days of Noah were, so will be the coming of the Son of Man..... Keep awake therefore, for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming..... Therefore you also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an unexpected hour."

Apocalyptic Jesus makes most of us uncomfortable. This message sounds foreboding and haunting, but is it?

Renowned theologian and preacher William Willimon tells the story of being on a mission trip several years ago in Honduras. One night around a campfire someone suggested that each person share their favorite bible verse. John 3:16, Paul's 'love is passage', the 23rd psalm and many other expected favorites were named. Then one local woman, through her interpreter shared that her favorite passage was Matthew 24: 36-44, the very passage we read today, brought her great comfort. Of course, everyone around the circle assumed that the interpreter had simply misunderstood or had erred in her translation.

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That hardly sounds like words of comfort, like good news, until the woman explained why. She had given birth to 5 children, but 3 had died of malnutrition before they were 3 years old. The coming of the Lord was a true comfort and hope for her as too much grief, pain, and

poverty had been added on to her in this life. Her hope was not in the precariousness of now, but in the renewed world of Christ's light and presence.

The difference between good news and bad news may just be where you are standing when you hear it.

Amen.