

Advent 1A, November 27, 2016

Isaiah 2:1-5

Romans 13:11-14

Matthew 24:36-44

Some of us may know the “Jesus Project”. It was a research project to try and determine what Jesus really said, what he probably said, what he probably did not say and what he probably definitely did not say in the Gospels.

And this brings me to the Gospel reading for today; is it a fact that Jesus said this? And if so, is the way that the tradition in the Church brought us to understand this passage the truth? You know, God is out to get you, so you had better watch out! And be particularly awake while God is snatching you away, so you can be even more aware of your misery and pain. But what did Jesus really say, or mean in this text?

I have to confess, I am so tired and fed-up, actually as a friend of mine likes to say, I am bone weary tired, of these apocalyptic texts that have been used through the ages to oppress oppressed people even more.

We have all waited for something in our lives on many occasions; a holiday to begin, a dentist’s appointment to be over, a kettle to boil. And the younger we are, the longer the wait seems to be.

We go through a lot of emotions when we wait, depending on what it is we are waiting for; emotions like anticipation, wonder, eagerness, dread, agitation, fear, longing, loss. Our time of waiting will be experienced differently depending on what we wait for and how old we are, I suppose.

However, after two thousand years of waiting for the second coming, is it any wonder that people are getting distracted, getting married, making merry,

paying taxes, struggling to put food on the table? So, what is the relevance of this waiting in such an alert state of mind?

Well, I guess it is in this state of waiting that we are supposed to understand today's Gospel reading, not so? We are to wait fearfully, otherwise we will miss the rapture!

Ah, the rapture!

When I was in high school, there was some kind of revival thing going on at school and they showed this film that depicted the "rapture." Of course all the people in the movie were upstanding citizens doing upstanding things, and all of a sudden some people disappeared amidst terrible sound and special effects. And then you saw little children wandering around bewildered because a parent is gone, a pot boils over, a car is lurching across the road without a driver. Crazy stuff.

This was, I believe, supposed to scare us into being Christians. Why? Jesus never tried to scare anyone into anything, other than threatening hell once in a while.

Maybe, just maybe, we have this whole thing the wrong way around?

For years we've been told that we have to live in this constant fear of being left behind when the rapture happens and that the "saved" are the ones who are taken away, and the others, the sinners, I guess, are left behind. But I don't believe that is what the text says at all. We were not put on earth to live in constant fear, because Jesus' coming is exactly to negate fear.

In the same way, we can read the metaphor of the thief, the thief comes in the night to steal something, and what does he steal? A few years ago, our Br Rob

preached on this and he said that Jesus is coming to steal our hearts. How wonderful is that?

So can we stop all of this Left Behind nonsense?

We who are left behind are the ones that are saved.

This ought to make sense to us, because Jesus has made it quite clear in his life, death and resurrection that the earth is his home. He is both Lord of heaven and of earth, yet somehow the earth bit is mostly forgotten. Also, when Jesus comes again, why would we want to go somewhere else when Jesus has just arrived?

Perhaps another factor that makes it difficult to stay with being grounded in the here waiting for Christ, is the fact that no one knows when this coming will happen. Jesus says in today's passage that neither angels nor even he himself; no one knows when this will take place except the Father.

The truth of the matter is that very few of us like surprises out of the unknown and life has a way of catching us off guard like that; sometimes with joyful results, but I would guess quiet often the opposite. It may be someone we love has a heart attack, or is in an accident, or the house burns down; or an unexpected call from a loved one.

And because many of us have had such experiences, we try to negate them by having contingency plans like insurance, medical aid, etc.

However, this kind of insurance will not take care of the uncertain nature of what we are called into this Advent.

What if, as his new Advent season begins, we insure ourselves by looking at our lives; looking at what and how Jesus will find us when he arrives. Knowing that, as we take stock, it is in the presence of the one who came, who comes and will come again.

Amen