

November 28, 2010
Advent Year 1 Year A

Jesus said to the disciples, "But about that day and hour no one knows, neither the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father.Then two will be in the field; one will be taken and one will be left.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." Matthew 24:36-44

Waiting for Christ

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I love Advent. This is my favorite time of the Church year.

It's a time of year when all things are possible. (Mark 10:27) It's the time when we stop to see and notice the Love and Joy that is possible in the world. During this time we notice the Love and Joy that God has made in Creation. And we see God's love in the face of His Son, Jesus Christ.

Advent is the time to wait for Christ. That's all we have to do -wait! We wait for Christmas as a time to celebrate Jesus' birth. And, as this Gospel reading from Matthew suggests, we wait for Christ to come again.

But how do we wait for Christ? And what does it mean that Christ will come in an unexpected hour and one will be taken and the other not!

My favorite story about getting ready for Christmas is- A Christmas Carol- by Charles Dickens. It's an old story from the 1800s in England. The main character, Ebenezer Scrooge, is a wealthy businessman in London. He is very rich but his heart is closed. His money gives him no pleasure. He is too busy hoarding it! Tiny Tim, another character in the story, is a poor boy whose father works for Scrooge. Scrooge doesn't even pay Tiny Tim's father enough to live on. And Scrooge makes him work on Christmas Day!

Scrooge's business partner, Jacob Marley, has died several years before. On Christmas Eve the ghost of Jacob Marley comes back and visits Scrooge! Jacob Marley had been rich in life and had died a very rich man. But his ghost is a sad sight. He is alone, and has to wander the earth carrying a ball and chain forever!

This is what the author Charles Dickens thought it might feel like – to be like Marley or Scrooge. Because when a person lives like that – totally selfishly –his heart closes up. It is like having chains around her heart. Heavy chains. When people's hearts are closed they get totally separated from everyone – and from God. When hearts are closed, God's love cannot get in!

Marley appears to Scrooge in a dream to tell him how to avoid becoming a sad wandering ghost with a closed heart! Marley tells Scrooge that if he keeps on living the way he is living – not caring about other people – hoarding all his money – not opening his heart to people or to God – he will end up like Marley forever!

There is a lot more to the story – and if you don't know it -read it aloud with your children - or watch the movie together! - But -- at last -- Scrooge starts to open his heart. He lets his employees have the day off! He goes to see Tiny Tim himself and enjoys Christmas dinner with the family. Scrooge makes up with his own relatives!

Maybe this is why I love Dicken's A Christmas Carol so much! It gives such a clear example of hope!

Today's Gospel tells us two things. First – that the Son of Man will come at an unexpected hour. We don't know when. And we have to be ready --if we want Jesus to take us with Him! And the Gospel has good news -- it is not too late to get ready! Whatever we have done in the past, it is not too late to start acting differently! Just like Scrooge -we can start now. We know what Scrooge needed to do to get ready for Christ – but how can we do it in our own lives?

One way to get ready for Christmas is to think – like the story of Scrooge –is there something I could do for someone else? Is there something that I have always wanted to do- for Christ? Is there something that I have thought – when I retire- Or when I have more time? Or when I have more money – – Ask yourself: how can I open my heart? How can I turn my life to God?

And not only can we start at any time to get ready for Christ – but we can have fun doing it! We are allowed – and encouraged even – to enjoy! So let's consider again, how can we get ready?

Do you wish you had more time for prayer? Now is the time ! Today – make the ten minutes before you go to bed. Get down on your knees or sit in your easy chair. Spend a moment with God. No need for words – or the right words- God will put the words in your heart – just let God in!

Do you have relatives that you are estranged from? That you haven't spoken to in a while? If you ever thought about doing something – making a gesture of reconciliation – NOW is the time.

Do you want to spend more time with your children or grandchildren- now when they are young? Do it! Leave fifteen minutes earlier and get home before they get tired and have a meal with them. Sit with your kids and go over the day. Or read a story. And be together. Go visit if you can. This year. Not next.

What about outside your own family? Would you like to help someone else's children enjoy Christmas? With toys? Or by helping to read to them? By making a shelter more homey and friendly?

Or how about extending a welcome and companionship to someone who doesn't have a lot of family nearby? Someone who is lonely. If any of these things is on your heart – talk to me, Fr. Jim, or Deacon Liz. There are so many opportunities right here in Stamford! And even in our own parish! You will find that doing any of these things will give you a lift too!

Jesus says we don't know when the Son of Man will come again. For some people this may cause anxiety- as if they have to be on guard every moment. But this is GOOD news.

NOW is the EXACT TIME to start to live in earnest – as though we really expect Jesus to come! Can you imagine what it will be like for Jesus to come again? To feel that complete love – that complete acceptance – no more partially knowing – but seeing Him face to face?

And before you protest – let me assure you that it is not about having to be perfect for judgment. God didn't make us perfect. Only Jesus was perfect – and he was both human and divine. We, of course, are not divine. And God does not expect us to be perfect. But because Jesus was made human and was one of us – we are brought close to God.

We only have to open our hearts and allow God to enter. Open our hearts. Now. In Advent.

And as we open our hearts to God and to one another we will find that WE are the ones being taken.

Taken into God's love through the love of Jesus Christ.

AMEN