

Anticipation or "How Much Longer?"

Isaiah 2:1-5 Romans 13:11-14

Oh to be a kid again. I don't know if kids today feel like I did when I was younger. But in some cases I believe they might. It seems like time moves much faster today than it did when I was 7,8,9 years old.

I remember looking for the daily paper when I got home from school. In the Portland Press Herald, right there on the front page usually down in the right hand corner, was a little square ad indicating the number of shopping days until Christmas.

Now, I knew in order to get the actual number of days until Christmas, I had to add in the Sundays. (Yes, I'm that old!) I didn't care about shopping days; that was adult stuff. Although, I did hope my parents were paying attention and not waiting until the last minute. You know that Tonka truck with the dump body and trailer might be sold out! But how much longer until Christmas?!

The anticipation was unbearable! When I was a child the time dragged on as if in slooo...w mooo... tion. And now... well, the next thing you know it will be January! Even though today the "Christmas season" is at least twice as long as it was when I was a kid. Even with all my protesting and bemoaning, now Halloween marks the start of the number of shopping days until Christmas!

Sadly, I don't feel that same anticipation anymore in the weeks leading up to Christmas. Anxiety perhaps. Some years, yes, even pastoral panic! No more getting up early Christmas morning to sneak a look at the tree. Or to see if some jolly old elf had enjoyed the cookies and milk left by the fireplace. Anymore when Christmas morning arrives, you're more apt to find me sleeping in. And for a few years early in ministry by then I would have come down with a cold or some illness. One of the hazards of ministry I hopefully have outgrown!

In 1969 the rock band Chicago asked us, "Does anyone really know what time it is?" And if anyone really cared. But is that really the case? Seems like most of us who live in North America live under the tyranny of time. We consume it just like we do other "consumables" however much we have (as though one could ever really possess time), we never seem to have "enough."

The world of instant communication has accustomed us to perceiving time in digital form. It was a number of years ago I purposely decided to wear a watch with a circular face and "hands." There is a difference in our perception of time

seeing it on a wall or Advent calendar vs. the digital display of our computer screens. Or in the digital readout of a wrist watch vs. the old timey watch with hands. Calendars and watches with “hands” give us a sense of where we are “in time.” We can see the minutes or days past and we can see that there is a future in which there will be a December 2nd, 3rd and 25th.

Paul reminds his readers that we already know what time it is, but again, do we really? Paul was speaking of *kairos* time. In classical rhetoric, *kairos* refers to the opportune time and/or place — that is, the right or appropriate time to say or do the right or appropriate thing. ... In Greek mythology, **Kairos**, the youngest child of Zeus, was the god of opportunity.

For Paul the time is now! It is time to get out of bed and get ready, dressed for the day. As Paul paints the picture it is still dark outside when his theological alarm clock goes off: the day is near but not quite here. Perhaps it's that mysterious moment when the darkness of the night begins to give way to shadows, and there is just enough light to know that morning is just around the corner. This is the time of anticipation, and Paul urges us, “Get up and get dressed! Today’s the day!”

Did he really come? Has the Christmas tree been transformed? “Come on, let's go see.” we whispered to each other. But first we better get dressed. That way we would be told to do so later before gifts.

Instead of those new Christmas pajamas from Aunt Clara (Remember the fluffy pink bunny suit?) the clothing Paul wants us to put on is Jesus Christ: his life, his way of being these are what we are to clothe ourselves with as we get ready to meet the future. Paul encourages us to adopt a new and honorable way of life. Put aside partying and drunkenness - this could be any of those things that dull the senses or draw one’s attention away from what is really going on and miss the opportunity.

Put aside quarreling and jealousy - things that destroy community and damage relationships with others.

The new day that God is bringing is a time when God and humanity will be reconciled; when peace, justice, and integrity will be the hallmarks of human society. What Paul wants is for Christians to start living **now** as through this new day has already begun.

In the early years of the Jesus movement, believers lived with a real sense of anticipation. The promises they read in the Hebrew scriptures seemed tangible;

the reign of God and all that it meant for cosmic “regime change” seemed not only possible but close at hand. When they prayed (daily) *“Thy kingdom come... on earth as it is in heaven,”* they were looking forward to that happening within their own lifetimes.

Two thousand years later this sense of anticipation has diminished. From time to time communities of Christians have developed a sense of urgency about the “end times”; some have even predicted precise dates for Christ’s return, to mark the beginning of the end.

For some branches of Christianity, the belief that God will usher in a new day of justice and reconciliation figures prominently in preaching and church life.

For many other Christians, however, the sense of anticipation that drives Paul’s writing has diminished, if not completely disappeared. To the extent that this is the case, we may be the poorer for having lost this vision, because for Paul, *this anticipation is not so much about circling a date on the calendar as it is about hope, hope.*

Paul really believes that the birth, death, and resurrection of Jesus is God’s sign that all of those promises about life and wholeness prevailing over brokenness and death are true, and that God can be trusted to do what God promised.

You know, perhaps I’ve lost some of my childhood anticipation. I no longer mark the calendar counting down to Christmas, the holiday. But I hope I’m not too late to recapture some of it for the Christ whose mass we celebrate on the 25th of December every year!

Paul knew that the time he spoke could not be found on any calendar but it is just as timely a matter as we will encounter in this life. It is time to wake up and look forward to what God will do in the future and *what God is beginning to do now in your life and the life of this church!*

There is time and indeed now is that time!