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9:00 a.m. Christian Education

10:00 a.m. Worship

Children's Sunday School during Worship



“The Light is Coming!”

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

Rev. Ron Holmes

November 28, 2010



Today is the first Sunday in Advent, that season of the church year that is a season of anticipation and preparation—anticipation and preparation for the celebration of Christmas, but also anticipation and preparation for a 2nd Christmas, the second coming of the Son of God, Jesus Christ. Advent is a reminder that we live in an “in between time,” in between those two events—the birth of Christ and the return of Christ. We live in that “in between time”—the Kingdom of God here (in the birth of Christ), but not yet here (pending the final triumphant return of Christ).

The best analogy I’ve heard to understand this “in between time” is one used by Nicky Gumbel, the presenter for the Alpha videos. The analogy Nicky makes is from World War II and the time between the success of the D-Day invasion and the end of the war. The success of the D-Day invasion in June of 1944 meant that the outcome of the war had been determined. The Allies were going to win the war. It was just a matter of time until the final victory was secured and the war was over. That time came in May of 1945 with V-E Day, Victory in Europe Day, the day Germany officially surrendered. However, in the between time of those two dates—June of 1944 and May of 1945—there were battles still to be fought. The Battle of the Bulge, for instance, one of the bloodiest battles of the war. The outcome of World War II was determined with the success of the D-Day invasion, but not finally secured until V-E Day.

That’s Advent. The Kingdom of God was ushered in with the birth of Christ. Redemption, salvation was brought to humanity. But the final victory is yet to be secured pending the return of Jesus Christ. In the meantime, there remain some battles still to be fought, some victories still to be won, some progress to be made toward the fulfillment of God’s Kingdom. That’s Advent.

You can hear it in the two Scripture passages read for this 1st Sunday in Advent. In Isaiah, the prominence that God deserves is finally gained: the mountain of the LORD’s temple is the highest mountain; the LORD is the judge of all people; there is an end to conflict—swords beaten into plowshares and nations no longer at war (don’t we all long for that day); a call to God’s people to “walk in the light of the LORD.” In Romans the “in between time” we live in is seen in such images as the progress of our salvation (“*nearer now than when we first believed*), and the contrast between darkness and light (“*put aside the deeds of darkness...put on the armor of light*”). In the final

fulfillment of God's Kingdom there will be no war, no conflict, no darkness and no deeds that accompany darkness. However, in the in between time of Advent we still struggle with such battles.

That is the challenge for us as Advent people. We long for the day when there will no longer be conflicts between nations and people, no longer any competition for God's place of prominence, and no deeds of darkness, not only the deeds we may not quickly identify with ourselves—carousing, drunkenness, sexual immorality and debauchery—but also those deeds we might even overlook as deeds of darkness—dissension and jealousy (negative jealousy, not the godly jealousy of 2 Corinthians 11 we noted a few weeks ago). We long for a day when those things are gone and the full light of Christ will be present. Someday that will be the case. But in the meantime, we struggle against such things. And we, as followers of Christ and in anticipation of His return, we are called to be Christ's light to the world. Until the light of Christ returns, we are to be that light to a dark world. That means we are to seek to remove those things from the world—beginning, first of all, in our own lives. Some of the battles we fight in this “in between time” are to remove...conflict from our lives; anything that diminishes the LORD's prominence in our lives; any deeds of darkness—not just carousing and drunkenness, sexual immorality and debauchery—but also such darkness as dissensions and jealousies in our own lives. Then, also, we are to bring the light of Christ to such things still present in the lives of others.

Someday, with Christ's return, all such things—darkness, debauchery, dissensions and the like—will be done away with in the light of Christ. God's creation will be restored to its full perfection. The Kingdom of God ushered in by the birth of Christ will be secured in total victory with Christ's return. In the meantime, we fight against the darkness in the world by bringing the light of Christ to the world. But, what does that look like?

Throughout this past week we've been hearing lots of news regarding the new security practices at airports. More news than we wanted to hear about it, I'm sure, but it was a lead story on every newscast. It appears we made it through Wednesday, the busiest air travel day of the year, without major incident—and by that I do not mean a terrorist attack (although, thankfully, we made it through without that as well), but rather a major incident from a protestor, or protestors, over the new security procedures. The concern, as you well know by now, was over the invasive procedures of airport security. The first being the revealing images from the new body scan equipment. Going through such equipment meant that some security agent in a room somewhere was getting an image revealing more of us than we would like. There was no way to hide from that...which was exactly the point. Just as the shoe bomber several years ago meant we all had to remove our shoes in going through security at the airport, so too did the infamous “underwear bomber” (some whacko who tried to hide an explosive device in his underwear!) now cause us to go through such invasive security procedures. No way to hide from that. One could “opt out” of going through the body scanner, but that required a just as invasive pat down from a TSA agent. Without getting into the politics of it—except to say that in the interest of security for any airplane flight I'm going to be on, I'll gladly submit to a revealing body scan—my point is that the light of Christ, who has come into the world bringing the Kingdom of God with Him and will come again to restore the Kingdom to its perfect completeness, the light of Christ is as revealing to our spiritual selves as the security body scanners are to our physical selves. Nowhere to hide...nothing that isn't revealed in the light of Christ.

Last week we closed our series on 2 Corinthians with a call to examine ourselves to see if we are in the faith. In that, we suggested that a good self-examination would include an honest evaluation of where we are in acknowledging Jesus Christ as our Savior and as our Lord. And a good gauge of where we are in following Jesus as Lord is how we're doing at living out the six marks of discipleship—praying daily, corporate worship weekly, reading the Bible regularly, serving at and beyond Shepherd of the Hills, being in relationships with others to encourage their spiritual growth...and our own, and giving generously of our time, money and talents. Those are good standards for an honest faith self-evaluation. However, interwoven through all six marks of discipleship, primary to any self-examination of a disciple of Christ, the power that fuels the light of Christ that is in the world is...love. Just as safety is the purpose behind the revealing scans at airport security checks, so love is the purpose behind the revealing light of Christ. Christ wants us to live in

the revealing light of His love for us. Paul reminds us of that fact in his letter to the Romans. Immediately preceding the section read for today, 13:11-14, Paul writes these words: *“Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another, for whoever loves others has fulfilled the law. The commandments, ‘You shall not commit adultery,’ ‘You shall not murder,’ ‘You shall not steal,’ ‘You shall not covet,’ and whatever other command there may be, are summed up in this one command: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ Love does no harm to its neighbor. Therefore love is the fulfillment of the law”* (Romans 13:8-10). Love is the antecedent, if you will, for Paul’s *“And do this...”* that began our reading for today. The “do this” is love. *“And [love in this manner], understanding the present time.”*

The essential “weapon” we have for the battles that continue during this “in between time” of Christ’s birth and His return is...love. Whatever the light of Christ reveals, in our own lives or in the lives of others, is motivated by love. The essential garment in “clothing ourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ” is love. Christ came to the world out of love. He will return to the world out of love. In the meantime, in this ongoing season of Advent between those two events, we are to “understand the present time,” “wake up from our slumber” and “put aside the deeds of darkness by putting on the armor of light”...the light that is Christ’s love for us...and for all humanity.