



Auburn Presbyterian Church

Passionately loving the Lord Jesus Christ and radiating that love to every individual

13025 Bell Air Drive, Auburn, CA 95603 (530) 823-3916 apc@auburnpresbyterian.org

“Meeting Jesus”

Matthew 24:36-44; Isaiah 2:1-5; Romans 13:11-14

The Lord’s Supper

Evening: “Hanging of the Greens” Party

Welcome to this first Sunday in the Church Year—the First Sunday of the Season of Advent. Advent begins another cycle of the church year, which always begins four Sundays before Christmas. Advent is a season designed to get us ready to meet our Redeemer. But it is a tradition in the church that on this first Sunday of Advent—the word “Advent” means “coming”—we focus on the **SECOND** Coming of Christ, when God makes things right through our Redeemer, the One who paid the ultimate price to bring us back to God. The first Advent that climaxes at Christmas comes around every year. The Second Advent is God’s “final answer”.

Therefore our text today is from Matthew’s Gospel, chapter 24. Open your Bibles there and then find verse 36 in chapter 24. That’s where we’ll begin. Listen with me for God’s voice in these words, as I read them aloud. *[text]*

Whew! This is one of many “apocalyptic” texts in our Bible, which speak about a new age when God fully **RULES**. Literally, the word “apocalypse” means, “revelation”—as if God were pulling back the curtain on His plans for the sudden and terrifying transition from rule by the Prince of This World, to rule by The Holy One of Israel. The final book of our Bible, The Apocalypse of John (we often call it, Revelation), is a visionary depiction of this final set of conflicts including a gruesome description of the terror that will come for those who are not ready to meet the Redeemer. Matthew’s chapter 24 is all about this, as well.

Jesus’ disciples were very aware of these ideas, for they were rampant in the Jewish culture from about 200 B.C. to 150 A.D. Rome ruled the world, and was especially hard on the citizens of Israel and Judah who kept trying to break away from Roman domination. Plenty of Roman soldiers were garrisoned in Israel, ready to crush any insurrection. You’ll remember that when Jesus was crucified, the soldiers who were executing Jesus put a sign up on his cross that said, “King of the Jews”. The Roman conquerors were sending a message to their Jewish subjects: “Look at what happens to someone who makes themselves king to oppose Roman rule.” To the Jewish religious authorities, however, this sign was an error; they had never asked Jesus to be their king. And to Christians, the Roman sign was an ironic prophecy, because Jesus **WAS** their king, a Crucified King and Lord, dying out of love for those who followed him in a new way of living for God. Jesus, the Son of Man, will come at the end to **RULE**. His first Coming was to Redeem, his second Coming is to Rule! But getting to that rule will be rough.

The disciples, like many of us, want to know “when” these things will happen. In these verses, Jesus tells us, “fogeddabodit”—even **HE** does not know when God is going to wrap it up! That’s a pretty astounding statement, isn’t it?

Jesus does say, it will be like the Flood we read about in Genesis 6. Noah was told the flood was coming, and why—to wipe the laboratory table clean of a creation gone wrong, with no one turning to the Creator except Noah and his clan. To the rest of the population in Noah's time, talk of a flood was ridiculous, and when it came, it seemed a sudden catastrophe, with no warning.

You know how the Flood ends, right? God drains away the water, Noah sends out a bird to bring him some sign that dry land has emerged, and then Noah can open the door of the ark at last. But, remember--it's the same earth on which the new creation and covenant with Noah takes place. God did not destroy everything, but basically scrubbed it clean-- rather like a giant baptism--to make a "clean start" with humankind. Noah was the savior then; Jesus is the Savior now. And at the end, instead of water as the agent of destruction, it may be fire.

Global warming may be a slow version of God's apocalypse, but like in Noah's time, most people behave like the proverbial "the frog in the kettle", who kept swimming around in the water as the heat gradually rose and rose, until the frog died from the heat. Jesus says the end will be like the flood of Noah's time. Maybe the slow boil of global warming is a sign of "the fire" at work!

The end will seem sudden—a surprise to most who were not reading the signs, as Jesus says in this chapter. Most will not be prepared when it finally comes. But what does it mean to be prepared? Indeed, if we cannot know when "the thief" is coming to steal our stuff, we have to always be ready. That's Jesus' message to us. But what does it mean to be "ready"?

In the 1970's American industry started feeling the effects of Japanese automobile excellence. I worked in a Ford Motor Company warehouse during some summers. The warehouse management personnel had offices on the second floor, overlooking the parking lot. Year by year, the mix of cars in the lot was changing. More and more of the cars were Japanese—the cars of their own employees. But like the frog in the kettle, the executives were oblivious and in denial of the change coming upon them. Seemingly overnight—but actually over a goodly number of years—the thief had been stealing market share from the American Big Three. Now Toyota and Honda have moved up to have to be counted among those major players. The point is, the leaders of this huge and successful American industry were not being alert to the signs of the times.

Jesus says, the end God has planned will be sudden, a surprise to most, and obvious to all. The end of the age will be that big a change. "When evening comes, you say, 'It will be fair weather, for the sky is red,' and in the morning, 'Today it will be stormy, for the sky is red and overcast.' You know how to interpret the appearance of the sky, but you cannot interpret the signs of the times." (Matthew 14:2-3, NIV)

But there's another lesson to draw from the revolution in automobile company success. When the sales of Japanese cars here in The States had become too obvious to ignore, there was a hue and cry that American companies were not being well led, and American companies and business schools began to avidly study Japanese manufacturing and management practices. One of the "best practices" that was identified was what Peter Drucker called, "Management by Walking Around". U.S. auto executives had largely been staying in their upper-level offices. They had become disconnected from the factory floors, out of touch with their own employees who had been making the decision to buy Japanese products despite discounts on a car from their own U.S. company.

The Japanese factory leaders and executives walked around on the shop floors, and talked with their employees. Had American managers done that, they could have learned why their own employees were “buying Japanese” instead of “buying American”, and could have picked up on a number of good ideas the workers had for improving the cars they were working on. No one had asked.

And another benefit of this “Management by Walking Around” is that by showing up unexpectedly, you can catch people doing good, and celebrate it! Long ago, studies had shown that when employees think management is involved, the quality and rate of their production goes up. People respond to attention!

Now here’s the application. Since, Jesus says, the end is going to be a surprise, how can we be ready? Here’s the answer: we do our best to please God all the time--because God is not only “out there, somewhere”; he is near. Jesus’ Second Coming could happen today.

When Jesus comes, two auto workers will be working on the line. One will be removed—a bad thing, in this context—and one will remain. Which is to say, we can be doing ordinary things, but the way we do them, and Who we do them for and with, is what makes all the difference. “Whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him,” Paul says in Colossians 3:17.

But we don’t have to wait for Jesus to show up as the Warrior at the End. Our “Boss”—our “Lord”— is walking around NOW, to meet and greet us, working through the Holy Spirit to build His Kingdom, and to invite us to join him in that work. Do you see him? He celebrates our victories and mourns our losses with us. Do you see him? The Kingdom of God is not just “after we die”. When we live as if Jesus were already ruling, we are IN the Kingdom of God.

So what is the “take-away” from passages like this we read in our Bibles? What is the meaning of this Apocalypse now? Let’s sum it up.

1. The “ordinary” life we know is not all there is.
2. God is getting ready to complete the installation of His Kingdom, where God’s righteousness and justice prevail.
3. The final step will come suddenly, by surprise.
4. To be ready for our Redeemer is to know His voice, enjoy His presence, and work with Him in Kingdom building, out of the raw materials of our lives and relationships. Initial stages of the Kingdom are happening NOW, and we can be part of it—or, not!

I don’t know about you, but if Jesus should come suddenly in my lifetime, I want my Boss to “catch me doing good.” And I have more confidence that’s just how it will be, to the extent that I know him now, listen to his voice, and obey—showing my love for him by joining him in his work.

Are you ready to meet your Redeemer? He comes—we celebrate his first Coming with his birth. We look forward to his second Coming at the end. And here in the middle, we can enjoy the privilege of partnership with Jesus, in building his Kingdom. And that’s how we can have the best life of all!

Really, now--don't you want the best?

(Communion)

[This sermon preached to the congregation of Auburn Presbyterian Church, Auburn, California
on December 2, 2007, by Rev. Kenneth B. Winter.]