

## St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church

November 27th, 2011 (#458a) - First Sunday in Advent

**Title: "Advent: A Time for Watching, Waiting, and Reflection"**

**Text: Luke 21:36**

Advent, says Webster's dictionary, is

- 1) a coming or arrival;
- 2) the period including the four Sundays just before Christmas; and
- 3) the birth of Christ or the Second Coming [of Christ]. This morning we are going to be looking at how we are to live in anticipation of Christ's Second Coming.

Please turn with me this morning to the 21st chapter of the Gospel of Luke, beginning with verse 25 and continuing through verse 36. Jesus is answering some of the disciples' questions about the signs of the end of the age. Hear God's unchanging Word.

*"There will be signs in the sun, moon and stars. On the earth, nations will be in anguish and perplexity at the roaring and tossing of the sea. Men will faint from terror, apprehensive of what is coming on the world, for the heavenly bodies will be shaken. At that time they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. When these things begin to take place, stand up and lift up your heads, because your redemption is drawing near."*

He told them this parable: "Look at the fig tree and all the trees. When they sprout leaves, you can see for yourselves and know that summer is near. Even so, when you see these things happening, you know that the kingdom of God is near. "I tell you the truth, this generation will certainly not pass away until all these things have happened. Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away. "Be careful, or your hearts will be weighed down with dissipation, drunkenness and the anxieties of life, and that day will close on you unexpectedly like a trap. For it will come upon all those who live on the face of the whole earth. Be always on the watch, and pray that you may be able to escape all that is about to happen, and that you may be able to stand before the Son of Man." (Luke 21:25-36; NIV) This is God's Word.

Chuck Swindoll tells a rather humorous story about one of his jobs following graduation from high school. He got a job in a machine shop in Houston, Texas. And one of the men who worked in that shop was an unforgettable character named Tex.

Well, Tex had spent most of his adult life working a lathe in that shop. He was the typical machinist, wearing a little gray and white striped cap - always greasy, and overalls that needed an oil change. And he had a disgusting habit - chewing tobacco - which meant that he spit a lot. He kept his tobacco pouch in his right hip pocket, and when his mouth needed a refill, he would

reach back, and without looking, grab a fistful of the stringy stuff, cram it into his mouth, and chew for an hour or so.

One hot, sticky day, Swindoll noticed a Texas-sized cricket on the floor of the shop. As he looked at the critter, he noticed that the color of the cricket was just about the same as the color of Tex's chewing tobacco. The wheels in his mind started moving. Chuck walked over and quickly stepped on the cricket, being careful not to damage it too much. He then picked it up and very gently placed it on top of Tex's tobacco pouch. After awhile, Tex needed to replenish his chaw, so he reached back and grabbed a fistful. In went the cricket along with a jaw full of tobacco. We're not told of Tex's reaction to Chuck's mischief.

Tex was quite a character. He had an invisible timer inside of him. He rarely had to look at the clock. Somehow he always knew when it was getting close to the last whistle of the day -- that time known as quittin' time. He was always washed up, ready to punch out. On one occasion, Swindoll mentioned to Tex that it was about time to start *"gettin' ready for quittin' time."* Tex replied, *"Listen, boy, I stay ready to keep from gettin' ready for quittin' time."* Advent is a time of getting ready for quittin' time. And blessed is the person who stays ready to keep from getting ready.

Prior to quittin' time on planet earth, a lot of things are going to happen, says Jesus. *"It will seem like all hell has broken loose - sun, moon, stars, earth, sea, in an uproar and everyone all over the world in a panic, the wind knocked out of them by the threat of doom, the powers-that-be quaking"* (The Message) But we don't know when that will take place, says Jesus, so be ready for quittin' time. Since we don't know when it will occur, we are to stay ready. Now that's good advice in every part of life. Be ready. Or as we used to say in the Boy Scouts organization, *"Be prepared."* For we simply don't know what any hour may bring. That is true of the future of the world, and it is true of our individual lives. And as we are constantly reminded in the news, opportunities or tragedies in life are not always predictable; we can't always see them coming.

Lloyd Ogilvie, former pastor at First Presbyterian Church of Hollywood in Southern California and chaplain of the U.S. Senate, said that when he sits down to breakfast with his wife, she often asks him how he feels about the coming challenges for the day. He often answers with the motto of a Highland regiment in his native Scotland: *"Ready, Aye, Ready."* That is an intelligent way to live. We don't know when quittin' time may be for ourselves, for someone we love, or for the world as a whole. It's best we live each day prepared. And that is done best by living each day fully, abundantly. It's done best by letting others know that we love them, and that they are loved by God.

And because the end seems delayed to us, there will be a tendency to drop our guard. The Message reports Jesus' warning this way: *"Be on your guard. Don't let the sharp edge of your expectation get dulled by parties and drinking and shopping. Otherwise, that Day [the final day, also known as The Day of the Lord] is going to take you by complete surprise, spring on you suddenly like a trap, for it's going to come on everyone, everywhere, at once. So, whatever you do, don't go to sleep at the switch. Pray constantly that you will have the strength and wits to make it through everything that's coming and end up on your feet before the Son of Man."*

Advent is the season of waiting ... waiting for Christmas to arrive ... waiting for Christ to show up at the end of time "*on clouds of glory*." But there are different kinds of waiting. For example, there is that waiting that takes place while we await the results of medical tests. We may fidget, twirl our thumbs, bite our fingernails, just going through the motions of life ... dreading the day when the results will arrive. And sometimes we even forget to live .. to really live during this state of waiting.

But then there is another kind of waiting ... the waiting in expectancy that young couples go through while awaiting the birth of their first child. It's the kind of waiting that a young man in our community told me about a few weeks ago as they await the arrival of their first child. It is the waiting that has stirred them to action. They have been taking pre-natal classes in anticipation of the birth of their child. Extensive household renovations have taken place and they've finally been completed. A room in their home has now been set aside for the baby. He has painted the room and she is in the process of decorating it with all sorts of "*baby*" things. This is a waiting in expectancy ... a waiting that stirs them to action as they anticipate the arrival ... as they anticipate the "*advent*" of their baby.

And so it is to be with the Christian as we await the arrival of Christ. Not in dreadful expectancy, but in joyful anticipation. The Apostle Paul tells us that even all creation groans, waiting expectantly to see what God is going to do next (Romans 8:22). The Christian life is an expectant life. It is a life lived in anticipation that the promises of God will be fulfilled. No matter what our situation may be today, regardless of how dark or depressing the weather outside, regardless of how hurtful or stressful our situation may be on the inside, we anticipate that God will fulfill His promises and that a better day is coming.

Dan Bauman tells a story that illustrates how we are to experience tomorrow's joy today. At Christmas time as a youth Dan was just like me. He always did a lot of snooping, trying to find the gift-wrapped presents and figure out what was in them. One year, he found a package that was easy to identify. The contents were golf clubs. His mother couldn't put enough wrapping on the clubs to disguise them from her sneaky son. Bauman writes: "*When mom wasn't around, I would go and feel the package and shake it and pretend I was on the golf course. The point is, I was already enjoying the pleasure of the future event, namely the unveiling. It had my name on it. I knew what it was. Only Christmas would reveal it in its fullness.*"

If you have given your life to Jesus Christ, then there is a place in heaven with your nameplate on the door. "*In my Father's house are many rooms,*" Jesus told us (John 14:2), "*and if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me.*" Only the Second Coming of Christ will reveal what God has for us in its fullness.

Years ago a young woman in New York was seeing a young man. One beautiful, spring day, he called to say that he had something special on his mind. He would pick her up in his car, an antique jalopy, and they would drive to the country for a picnic. They drove to Long Island. The young man seemed preoccupied. They drove along in silence. Later on they headed back to New York. Back in the city, he broke his silence. Something great and significant was about to occur, he declared solemnly. And Central Park would be the appropriate place for it to happen.

They drove through the park. As you might imagine the young woman's expectations soared. *"The great moment is here,"* said the young man breathlessly. And with great excitement he watched as the odometer on his car slowly passed the 100,000 mile mark. *"There,"* he said with great joy, *"Everything is back to zero."*  
*"Yes,"* thought the young woman, *"Everything is back to zero."*

Christ's return will not be so anticlimactic. We can be sure of that. What began on earth in a humble manger shall be completed in wondrous majesty and glory. What began on a cross will end with a crown. When will it occur? Nobody knows ... not even the angels of heaven. And so the best thing to do is to follow the example of Tex, Chuck Swindoll's co-worker, and stay ready. Stay ready for the most wondrous experience that God's children will ever have. No wonder Advent is a season of living on tiptoe. Just as children can hardly wait for Christmas morning, so may we who are followers of Jesus wait in joyful expectancy for his return. And may this anticipation move us to action ... to love and good works, for the sake of Christ and his kingdom.

Let's stay ready, so we won't have to get ready for quittin' time. AMEN.