

## Working While We Wait

(Romans 13:11-14)

Sermon delivered by The Very Rev. Matt Rhodes at Christ Church, Millwood, Virginia  
First Sunday of Advent, December 1, 2019

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of all our hearts be acceptable to you O Lord, our creator, our sustainer and our redeemer. Amen.

### **What time is it?**

We know the day. We know the month. And those saying a little praying this morning for a short sermon might even glance at their watches so they'll know the hour and minute.

But what **time** is it? We know **where** we are, but it's just as important to reflect on **when** we are. As I wrote in my most recent parish newsletter column, The Rev. Fleming Rutledge refers to the season of Advent as "the Time Between,"<sup>1</sup> the period between the two comings of Christ in which we are currently living. There is the birth of Jesus that we anticipate through these next four weeks, and there is the second coming of Christ that will occur at "that day and hour no one knows."<sup>2</sup> We are walking through this important moment between **past** and **future** ... between **already** and **not yet**. We are watching for what we know is going to happen. We are waiting to hear once again the promise made to Mary ... and the reassurance given to Joseph ... and the proclamation made to the shepherds.

The fact that we are in a time of **waiting**, however, doesn't mean that we shouldn't also use this time to be **doing**.

In the months and years before the birth of Jesus, the people of Israel anxiously awaited the coming of the promised Messiah ... but they didn't stop everything else they were doing while they waited. Life went on. Work went on. Trading and agriculture went on. Worship certainly went on. In the months and years following the resurrection and ascension of Jesus, his early followers excitedly awaited his triumphant return ... but their work didn't stop as they anticipated that day. For them, life and labor and worship went on, although it went on with a new intensity ... a new joy ... a new purpose.

Now, as we live in this moment, things for us should go on as well. There is too much in the world that demands our attention and which we can do during this time. Those who are experiencing difficulties in this life – those who are experiencing hunger, or illness, or unemployment, or grief, or fear – should be the ones drawing us away from **waiting** and into **doing**. The voices of those whose names are known to us, and those whose names are known

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<sup>1</sup> Fleming Rutledge. *Advent: The Once & Future Coming of Jesus Christ*, p. 7.

<sup>2</sup> Matthew 24:36 (NRSV).

to God alone, are the voices that call out to us. Theirs are the calls that we can answer; theirs are the hands that we can hold; theirs are the lives devoid of love or compassion that we can embrace and fill with the love of God. It is nothing less than our work as children of God, and nothing less than the work to which the Church is called.

As Rutledge writes, “The disappointment, brokenness, suffering, and pain that characterize life in this present world is held in dynamic tension with the promise of future glory that is yet to come. In that Advent tension, the church lives its life.”<sup>3</sup> God has called each one of us ... not just to the promise of future salvation and resurrection, but to the work that demands our attention in the **here** and **now**. Should we not do all we can to share the promise of that glory that is to come with those experiencing the struggles that are already here? Should we not give them a vision of hope when all they see is hopelessness?

Even with that promised glory ... even with the promise of Christ’s triumphant return ... we are nowhere close to finished. “Because the Day of Christ lies ahead, more is expected of us”<sup>4</sup> – **much** more. And that is what I see in the words of Paul in his letter to the Church in Rome – the call to “put on the armor of light” and “live honorably as in the day.”<sup>5</sup>

So we know the time. We know the promise. We know the call to us. So **what will we do** to **fill the time** ... to **live up to the promise** ... to **answer the call**? For me (and I think you’ve learned this about me in the last two-plus years), our work is summarized in the words of Matthew 25. Feed the hungry. Give something to drink to the thirsty. Welcome the stranger. Clothe the naked. Take care of the sick. Visit the imprisoned. The wonderful thing about doing each one of these is the breadth and depth to which we can do it.

The hungry and thirsty are fed physically through the work of our pantry ... and they can be fed spiritually through inviting them to join us here. We can welcome the strangers to our nation, our state and our community ... and we can welcome those who walk through the front door on Sunday morning. We can physically clothe those in need ... and we can help clothe them spiritually in their own armor of light. We can offer help for those who are physically ill ... and we can offer help for those suffering in mind and spirit. We can go and support those who are in prison ... those in the physical prisons of the world and those imprisoned by grief, or addiction, or fear, or loneliness.

Among these are things I see done here ... things done **often** and done **well**. But as much as we may want to pause during this season of waiting, **we can’t**. For while we may be waiting to see what happens next for us, others are wondering if **anything** will happen for them. While we wait to see what God has in store, others are waiting to see if God even **sees or hears** them. While we wait for the future glory promised to us, others are wondering if God has promised **anything** for them.

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<sup>3</sup> Rutledge, p. 7.

<sup>4</sup> Joanna M. Adams, “Romans 13:11-14 – Homiletical Perspective.” *Feasting on the Word: Year A, Vol. 1*, p. 17.

<sup>5</sup> Romans 13:12-13 (NRSV).

As you move through this wonderful, mystical, holy, mysterious season, put on your armor of light. Put on the Lord Jesus Christ. **Work** while **waiting**. Live honorably. Love completely. Show the hope. Share the promise.