

November 27, 2022
First Advent

Matthew 24:36-44

“The God Who Shows Up”

We have arrived at the first Sunday of Advent. The season of the church year in which ***we prepare for God coming among us at Christmas***. This is the central purpose of Advent and receives the lion’s share of our attention. Texts like the one read for us this morning bring us *another theme of Advent* – and that is the coming of Jesus, not as a baby, *but as a returning hero* who will claim the world he died to reconcile to God.

The early church spent a lot of time thinking about this because they expected this cataclysmic return to happen ***quickly***. When it didn’t happen people began to wonder what they had misunderstood. This dynamic has been present in the church to varying degrees ever since. But it isn’t Jesus apparent tardiness which has *gotten us into trouble* near so much as *our insistence that the way to make sense of it all is to figure out where and when Jesus will make his entrance*.

The fancy phrase is “eschatological expectation” - referring to the revealing of the glorified Christ. The phrase may not be familiar but the dynamic certainly is. Books, movies, relatives, and friends have all focused a great deal of energy through the years on ***solving the riddle*** of *when and where* Jesus will make an appearance. It has consumed large amounts of energy and caused untold numbers of problems as time and time again the best efforts to calculate *what God will do* has failed.

Matthew, it would seem, wanted to spare us this heart ache. The first verse of today’s reading tells us ***no one knows*** the answer to this question – not even Jesus. As intriguing as the question may be – if ***Jesus*** doesn’t know the timetable how is it we have spent generations worrying about it?

I think discomfort does that to us. We are most interested in Jesus coming back *to set the world to rights* when our personal world or the world at large feels as if it is ***spinning out of control***. Come on, Jesus! Get back here and make this world a more habitable place! And the sooner the better.

Our text today doesn't offer us much help on that score, does it? We have asked for inside information and Jesus reminds us we already have information at our disposal which we might call, "*actionable intelligence.*"

My father flew airplanes in times of crisis and war as part of the Air Force. Some time after he retired, I came home from college and asked him if he would teach me to fly. He looked at me for a moment and said, "*Learn how to drive a car first.*" It is possible he was remembering the "slight" body damage done to my mother's 1967 Camaro with a 327-stock engine while it was in my care. But I don't think so. I think he was saying, "*You are aspiring to something beyond your reach when you can attend to something really important with-in your grasp."*

I believe this is what Jesus is saying in our text today. You want to know when the full expression of the kingdom of God is coming? How about you *show me you know how to live as a citizen of the kingdom here and now?* We all have a "to do" list to manage. But let's not forget to *manage our lives as the gift of God* for the purposes of God.

God's kingdom is here through Jesus – but it will one day be fully present and everything that happens will be pleasing to God. It is that full expression of God's life which we want to partake of in our lives today. ***Our living is meant to show we belong to God's kingdom now*** – even as the purposes of God's kingdom are rarely uppermost in the functioning of the world around us.

All this worrying about when and where Jesus second Advent will happen is rooted in the ***deeper worry*** that perhaps we are dealing with a God ***who isn't going to be there*** when needed. Our text in Matthew today reminds us *we serve a God who shows up*. Expect more – keep awake – because God can be present in any moment. Perhaps we should say, *God is present* in every moment *giving us the desire and ability to live as God's children* – children of God's kingdom.

We know how to ask for this greater reality. We do it all the time. "*Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.*" We live in relationship with a God who shows up. As we wait to celebrate God among us at Christmas, let's show up too.