

## “*What time is it?*”

November 29, 2009

Text: *Jeremiah 33:12-16, Luke 21:25-36*

### I.

***What time is it?*** Always an important question. Thanksgiving has come and gone and—already—it’s the first Sunday of Advent, 2009. Can you believe it? God is on the move and the Spirit is alive to the promises of the birth at Bethlehem.

***What time is it?*** In recent years, it seems, it’s a time of incredible change. I don’t know about you, but I’m having trouble keeping up.

- We’re living in a time when newspapers are becoming obsolete. Have you noticed how the Miami Herald has become incrementally smaller over the past couple of years? What’s it going to be like? A world without the morning newspaper.
- And it’s getting so you can’t even call people anymore on their landline telephone. This is no doubt more the case for us older folks. But even Yvette and I seldom answer our landline. Everything is cell phone ... or email. It’s just the way it is.
- And now there’s FACEBOOK. ***What time is it?*** It’s *facebook* time. I’ve heard of *facebook* for sometime, now, but I didn’t think much about it. I just assumed it was some new technology that I wouldn’t need to know much about. But now, it’s beginning to look like if I don’t get on *facebook*, I’m going to be out of the loop—irrelevant, a frightening thought.

I’ve heard a number of television commentators say this ... about *facebook*; how it’s the way of the future, or at least of the next few years.

And then, just this past week I got an email from our UCC Regional Minister, a good friend of mine, Rev. Bill Koch. A number of you will remember him when he preached here a little over a year ago. He says our Southeast Region of the Florida Conference of the UCC (our area) now has our own *facebook page*.

And he’s telling me how I can get on it and how our church can upload news, photos, videos etc. and what a great communication tool it’s going to be for our churches.

So, check with me in a month or sooner; I’ll probably be on *facebook* hoping to be somebody’s friend. Isn’t that how it works? ***What time is it?*** It’s way ahead of my time, that’s for sure.

## II.

The chairman and CEO of Home Depot once said:

*Every morning in Africa, when a gazelle wakes up, it knows it must run faster than the fastest lion or it will be killed.*

*And every morning, the lion wakes up and knows it must outrun the slowest gazelle or it will starve.*

*The point is: it doesn't matter whether you're a gazelle or a lion, when the sun comes up, you better start running.*

***What time is it?*** It's time to pay attention ... time to see the BIG PICTURE of our lives ... time to understand who we are and what God is calling us to.

Time has different implications. An airline pilot phoned the air-traffic controller one day and asked him what time it was.

*What airline are you flying?* came back the response.

*What airline am I flying,* the pilot repeated. *What possible difference does that make? I want to know what time it is.*

Patiently, the air-traffic controller replied, *Well, sir, it makes all the difference in the world.*

- If you're with United Airlines, it's 1500 hours;
- If you're with American, it's 3:00 p.m.
- If you are with Continental, the big hand is on the 12 and the little hand on the 3.
- And if you're with ComAir, it's Tuesday.

What time is it? It's important to know.

## III.

As many of you know, I'm a Lectionary preacher which means the scripture readings are pre-determined and organized over a three-year cycle. This morning's readings, therefore, are among the selected readings for the first Sunday of Advent. Always, these *first Sunday of Advent* readings include an apocalyptic reading from one of the Gospels.

The apocalyptic has to do with the end of times, with the final consummation of creation in line with God's divine purposes. Typically, apocalyptic language is language of radical change. Historically, it emerged out of the faith experience of oppressed peoples—people, desperate for a better day ... for a glimmer of hope ... for a sense of expectation about tomorrow.

Apocalyptic literature in the Bible is not to be taken literally, of course. It's metaphorical narrative, driven by hope.

And that's precisely what's great about Advent and the Christmas event: they call us to hope and they call us to the promise of the future. In Advent, we wait and prepare ... and eventually the stars align, Jesus is born in a Bethlehem manger, and love is given a new face.

In this apocalyptic reading from Luke, Luke alerts us to the signs of the times, the signs that signal foundational change of a riveting hope.

Apocalyptic language is language of hope. Check it out:

*There will be signs in the sun, the moon, and the stars, and on the earth distress among nations confused by the roaring of the sea and the waves.*

***People will faint from fear and foreboding ... The power of heaven will be shaken.***

*Now when these things begin to take place, stand up and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near.*

In other words: there will be a better day, a day of reckoning, a day of sorting out. What time is it? It's time to be awake ... time to pay attention to the signs of the times.

#### IV.

*Look at the fig tree, says Jesus. It tells us when summer is coming. Read the times as you read a fig tree. Stay awake! Stay alert! Be aware of the signs of the times. Don't allow yourself to be sucked into the illusions and distortions of the world.*

***What time is it?*** It's time to be awake and aware. Time to see our lives for what they are and to see our future for what it can become. We are NEVER—get this—NEVER bound by present realities or by yesterday's bad news.

Every year, as it ushers in the Christ event, Advent reminds us that Good News is on the horizon. Jesus is coming. God has heard the cry of the lonely and the desolate. God has received the petitions of the downcast—the unemployed, those without health care and on and on.

***What time is it?*** The prophet **Jeremiah** knows. It's time for a righteous branch to spring up for David ... it is time, says the Lord, *when I will fulfill the promise I made to the house of Israel and the house of Judah ...and justice shall be executed in the land.*

The scriptures of Advent remind us that there will be a reckoning, a sorting out; and God's truth and God's justice will rise up.

Always, friends, we live our lives towards expectation—towards expectation of God’s promises and expectation of what we will do in support of God’s purposes.

These are contentious times—times of uncertainty and anxiety about what the future will bring. With the national debate on health care reform, the worrisome challenge of the war in Afghanistan and, of course, the BIG ONE: the economy.

What to do? Nobody knows. Theories abound, some better than others. But what to do? And everyday, we see the consequences—with rising unemployment and continuous shocking news of the abuses of Wall Street.

## V.

It’s time to stand up, friends, give ourselves to hope and live our lives towards expectation. The Spirit invites us to life—life abundant—and not to one more day of status-quo or one more day of *same ‘ole, same ‘ole*.

It’s time to take these times—whatever they are—and transform them. These are times to rethink and reconfigure (the way we see the world), times to realign and restructure (the way we see our career unfolding) , and times to redirect and refocus (our energy and our life-purpose).

The language of the apocalyptic announces Advent each year because it’s a language of hope—of radical hope, really—hope that things can change, that Christ will come and that the old will give way to the new. Always, Jesus’ coming marks a new beginning and a rebirth.

The life-blood of our Christian faith rests on such new beginnings. That’s what our faith is about—new beginnings.

It’s about new ways of seeing the world, new ways of seeing relationships; and it’s about realizing that we are NOT bound by the imperfections and failures of yesterday. It’s so important to believe that. We CAN start again; people CAN change and the world around us CAN be transformed.

The Good News of our Christian faith is precisely that we can live again.

The Psalmist seems to grasp this:

*Make me to know your ways, O God; teach me your paths.  
Lead me in your truth, and teach me,  
for you are the God of my salvation;  
for you I wait all day long.*

## VI.

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

It's time for the hopes and dreams of the season to rise up in us, time for us to behold the promises of God, and time for us to be the church and the people of faith God calls us to become.

Always, time is of the essence. As **Wesley D. Avram** prompts us in a commentary on Luke 21, the present moment—every moment—is full of serendipity and grace. It is special and it is unique because it is a gift, to be accepted in thanksgiving,

- trusting in the promise which lies behind it,
- praying for the strength to do what is necessary to fill it with faithfulness—
- and then, waiting for God.

***What time is it?*** It's time for trusting, and praying, and waiting ... and then acting.

Again, every moment is special, every minute ...

*Just a tiny little minute, only 60 seconds in it.*

*Didn't choose it ... can't refuse it ...dare not abuse it ... don't want to lose it ...*

*God knows I need to use it.*

*It's just a tiny little minute, only 60 seconds in it ...but eternity is in it.*

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

Time to fill our waiting with our believing and our hoping with our faithful living.

**All praise be unto God! Amen!**

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