

It's Later Than It's Ever Been!
Advent 1, Year A
Romans 13:11-12, Luke 21:25-36

We are entering the season of Christmas card theology. You've had the experience of trying to pick out the right card for some secular unchurched friend. The trick is, how religious do you make it? Do you go with "Happy Holidays" and chose a card with Santa or do you make it explicit about the messianic meaning of Christmas and choose a card with a Biblical message and a depiction of Baby Jesus in the manger?

Advent is the season when the church takes four weeks to tell us what time it is. Advent time does have a messianic meaning.

What time is it? If you don't know what time is, how can you know what time it is? And this is what Advent is about. Knowing the time, penetrating the veil which hides the mystery of time.

Advent is knowing the time; that now it is high time to wake up. The time of our salvation is near, the night is passing, the day is breaking, so let us walk in the light.

We have to admit that even as Christians, we don't really know much of the metaphysics of time. I like what St. Augustine said, "When no one asks me about the mystery of time, I know. But when I must explain time to someone else, I just do not know."

Or maybe this limerick will guide us:

There was a young girl named Miss Bright
Who could travel much faster than light
She departed one day
In an Einsteinian way
And came back on the previous night.

The earliest Christians expected Jesus to return soon, during their lifetime. That is what Jesus is preparing us for in today's Gospel reading. Be alert, the Son of Man is coming soon.

The early New Testament church was ready and expectant. But most of us don't expect any great colossal coming of Christ anymore, anywhere, anytime. We've plunged into pessimism about time, especially about the immediate return of Jesus.

Society holds a whip in one hand and a clock in the other. We have to run faster and faster, making use of every minute, just to keep up with the times, whatever that means.

It is into this time crunch that the eternal God has stepped to bring a new kind of time. God did it at the right time, the time of the coming of Jesus, born of Mary, born under the conditions of our wretched times.

What time is it, then, according to God's way of telling time? It is the fullness of time. The kingdom of God is at hand. It's later than it's ever been.

Something has happened to human time because of the Advent of eternity, of God's time. If Advent is the coming of God into human time with the arrival of Jesus at Christmas, then it is high time for us to do the same, to take time for God and for each other. To make time holy again.

To take time for another person is to give that person the most precious thing you have. Not your money. No, time is the new currency. Almost everything else about you is renewable and replaceable. But once time is gone, you cannot get it back. There is no reversing the aging process. When time is

gone, it is gone forever and there is only so much of it left for each of us.

That is why we want to keep it for ourselves and not waste any of it. But often our aggressive, energetic, productive use of time blocks out our view of God's coming among us.

God has taken our being and our bodies into God's own time. Advent means the day is dawning. Put on the armor of light. Walk in the light of Christ. Let your light so shine before others that they may see your good works and give glory to God.

It is high time to live as though God's time for us and our time for each other is what a human lifetime is all about. Life is a gift with plenty of enough time to love. The deepest mystery of time is defined by the outpouring of God's love for us.

I hear people say, "Oh, I'd like to join that ministry or be involved in that Bible class or come to worship, but there just isn't enough time." You can't make time, but how you spend your time sure will make you.

You tell time not by the clock, but by the events of your life. Make time to recognize and love God...and to recognize and love each other. Make time to love God, love others, serve.

The old philosopher tells us in the Book of Ecclesiastes, for everything there is a season and a time for every matter under heaven. (3:1) He tells us there is a time to be born and a time to die; a time to weep and a time to laugh; a time to mourn and a time to dance; a time to keep silent and a time to speak; a time for war and a time for peace.

There is a time for all things under heaven. And that is why this season we are entering

today, the holy expectant season of Advent, is for letting God's time enter our time, letting all our moments of time, letting all our toiling and planning, letting all our comings and goings, point to the right time, the fullness of time, the Advent of God's eternal time breaking into our human time at Christmas...and every day.

There is a time for everything. But it is a question of getting your timing right, of getting in step with the Advent of God's timing for all things under heaven.

Every time is the right time in God's time. God's time has come down from heaven and is bent in the direction of others. In God's time, every time is the time to bring more light and love into our world. That's the good news of Advent and our hope for Christmas!