

In this liturgical season of we find ourselves positioned in the space between “Already” and “Not Yet.” It’s the beginning of the new Church year when we await Jesus’ birth, but Christ has already come into the world according to our linear understanding of time. We wait for and expect a return of Christ. This is based deep in the Jewish tradition of “apocalypse”, which is a longing for justice, a time for God to set things right. It is a good hope, but it probably won’t happen according to our expectations.

So we wait until Christ’s return, we ‘live ready,’ because we don’t know on what day our Lord is coming. In the very next chapter from today’s Gospel reading, Matthew 25, we are told that Jesus comes to us in guises we do not expect --or recognize, in the hungry, the thirsty, poor, naked, sick, aliens, prisoners. If we are ready for him when he comes in these forms, we have become part of the coming of Christ. We begin to be co-creators of a new earth. So the question of the day, or perhaps I should say the season of Advent is: are we awake to seeing Christ; are we ready?

I hope we are, because I have a feeling God doesn't make appointments. Which reminds me of the old clergy habit of “calling on” our parishioners. The question always is: do you make an appointment which often precipitates a frenzied cleaning of the house—or give the person an excuse to beg off-- or does the clergy just show up? That option often just makes people angry because they don’t have time to prepare—or it makes them late for another appointment, television show or podcast. Most of us schedule ahead.

My point is-- among good friends (and some relatives), unexpected visits are *expected*. We are glad to see them, no matter how messed up the house is or what we are wearing. We make the time to visit. The truth is that like to visit with those we have a great relationship with.

I guess that begs the question: what kind of relationship do we have with Jesus? Do we need prior warning of his arrival in our lives—not matter what guise he may be assuming—so we can be ready? Or do we welcome him no matter where we see him, welcome him as one of the people in our lives we love more than anything.

Even though we don't know when Jesus will happen upon us, the fact that he is coming to us is vitally important for our lives right now. Are we ready?

People are more concerned with eating and drinking, going to the gym, watching TV or going on social media, than we are about watching for Jesus in the people we see. Thanksgiving and Christmas and New Year’s are more about glitz, toys and partying than they are about Jesus walking with us every step of that celebration packed way. And he’s not coming to be your buzzkill—he’s coming to help you share the love you carry around with you like a gift to give away.

Like in the Gospel—it’s human nature to focus on big events-- weddings or feasts-- or building a metaphorical ark for ourselves so that we can escape any impending disaster, but there is something more important than our feasts or our future plans: the Son of Man could come.

He will probably show up without an appointment. What would you tell him? "Go away, I'm busy getting this meal ready. We've got guests coming tonight." Or, "Don't bother me now, it's my wedding day. I've got a million details to take care of." The real question is: what or who is most important to you now, and are you ready to put everything you’re working on to the side so that you can embrace love?

Now don't get me wrong --work is important—that's why I'm here. That's what we do to provide food and shelter for ourselves and our families. But there is something more important than even our work. Jesus.

Maybe we should prepare for Jesus.

We prepare for thieves! We don't know when a thief might break into our house, so we prepare for that potential at all times. The less active of us simply lock our doors and windows; the more vigilant buy Simplisafe, or a Ring alarm. We leave lights on when we're gone. Have neighbor watch the house. Insure our possessions. And all of that for a potential *thief*, because we know he won't make an appointment.

We don't usually open our doors wide to an unexpected stranger. We do welcome in a friend. We give the pushy salesman who shows up at our door or on our phones an abrupt heave-ho. But we always open the door for a friend. If a loved one calls from far away, even during an important meal, we talk to them. What kind of relationship do we want with Jesus?

There has never been a more important time in history to be alive than right now. Here we stand positioned in the space between "Already" and "Not Yet." We focus on the daily events that normalize life, like eating, drinking, marrying and giving in marriage; like working, and shopping, and preparing food and meals. But let's not be lulled into this comfortable normalcy and fall asleep at the wheel.

For God's sake, let us keep awake, for we do not know on what day—or in what guise-- our Lord is coming. Christ can and will startle us if necessary. But I think all of us would prefer to be ready. Amen.