

Conley Memorial Presbyterian Church, First Sunday of Advent, November 27, 2016

What Are We Waiting For?

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Isaiah 2:1-5 Romans 13:11-14

Today is the first Sunday of Advent, the period of waiting and anticipating the celebration of the birth of our Savior but more importantly it is the period of anticipating for his Second Coming. That is what we are really waiting for --- not Christmas but Heaven on Earth.

Isaiah talks about the establishment of the mountain of the Lord's temple. He talks about climbing that mountain.

Have you ever climbed up a mountain? I have, several of which are along the Appalachian Trail here in North Carolina and in Virginia. That kind of hiking isn't easy but it is worth doing if you are physically able to do so as I once was but no longer am.

The mountain that Isaiah talks about is metaphorically far higher than any mountain that I have climbed. It is not a journey to a wonderful view of God's creation but instead is a journey into God's presence. I must admit, however, that on top of some of the mountains I have hiked, as I looked out over the surrounding hills and valleys, I did feel that I was in God's presence.

Climbing Isaiah's mountain will be a time when weapons of war are dismantled and the Earth is transformed into a fertile garden according to Walter Bruggeman, et al. ⁽¹⁾ It is a time of God bringing peace and harmony to the whole world.

Isaiah was predicting that this would happen in the future, he didn't say when. He was predicting what we are now waiting for, the Second Coming of our Savior, Jesus the Christ. Isaiah of course did not know of Christ but he did know of the anticipated coming of a Messiah in Jewish scripture.

Isaiah refers to the mountain of the Lord's temple, the mountain upon which Jerusalem sits. Visitors had to climb that mountain to see the city and had to climb even higher to visit the temple, the home of God in the eyes of the Jews. To climb that mountain meant to climb into God's presence.

In his letter to the Romans, Paul puts Isaiah's climb up the mountain into a

different context.

Paul expected the Second Coming to occur soon telling the Romans that, *“The hour has already come ... because our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed. The night is nearly over; the day is almost here.”* For Paul, salvation drawing near is *“... inextricably linked with altered behavior, since the way we live always reflects our loyalties.”*⁽¹⁾ He admonishes us to, *“... behave decently ... not in carousing and drunkenness ,, sexual immorality and debauchery [and] not in dissension and jealousy but to clothe ourselves with Jesus Christ.”*

As William Barclay⁽²⁾ said, Paul *“... expected the Second Coming of Christ. The early church expected it at any moment. And therefore it had the urgency to be ready. That expectation has grown dim and faint, but one permanent fact remains ... the time grows shorter, for we are every day one day nearer that time. We, too, must have all things ready.”*

Paul assures us that, *“... our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed.”* As each day passes we are one day closer to the day when we shall finish our climb up the mountain and see our Savior face to face.

For Paul, the coming of salvation is linked with altered behavior. He admonishes us to be ethical with the plea that reasonable service of God consists in the *“... offering of the ‘body’, that is, the entire person to”* him.

A devotion in [These Days](#) (December 5, 2013) states words which apply to me very well. *“Before I enter the sanctuary to lead worship, I put on my black clerical robe to remind me that I have been called by the church. My robe draws attention away from me as an individual and points to Christ. For me, it is like Paul telling us to put on Christ and put away our old ways as in the Randy Stonehill song: ‘I’m packing up my old clothes with my old and foolish ways. They just don’t seem to fit me anymore. I see the light of morning with different eyes today and I’ giving my tomorrows to the Lord.’”*

I didn’t write those words but I could have. They fit me rather well.

So what are we waiting for on this the first Sunday of Advent? We are awaiting expectantly the Second Coming of our Lord and Savior and the salvation which will come then. We aren’t waiting for Christmas. We are waiting to reach that top of the mountain and to celebrating with our Lord.

Amen

(1) Walter Bruggeman, et al, A Lectionary Commentary Based on the NRSV – Year A, Westminster John Knox Press, Louisville, KY 1995.

(2) William Barclay, the Letter to the Romans, rev. ed., Westminster John Knox Press, Louisville, KY 1975.\

Note: Scripture quotations are from the New International Version of the Bible, 2011

