

Conley Memorial Presbyterian Church, 3rd Sunday of Advent, December 11, 2016

Expectations!

Dr. Kenneth Humphreys
December 11, 2016

James 5:7-11

As I have said before, Advent is not about the birth of Christ and the Christmas celebration. It is about the Second Coming of our Lord.

The early Christians expected Christ to return during their lifetimes, certainly not more than 2000 years later. Even now we have no idea when the Parousia, the Second Coming, will be --- tomorrow, next month, next year, the next century, the next millennium, or even later. Even Jesus did not know and we will not know until the Parousia actually occurs.

It seems like some preacher somewhere makes headlines every year claiming to know the exact date, yet they are always wrong. They claim to know based upon some convoluted interpretation of scripture but that makes absolutely no sense at all. If Jesus himself didn't know, how could they? Sadly, every time one of these predictions of the end time is made, some people become convinced, quit their jobs and give away their possessions, being left with nothing when the predicted date comes and goes.

Our reading from James is more pragmatic. Even though James also expected Christ to return relatively soon, he urges patience likening it to a farmer planting his crops. The farmer must wait for early rains to cause the seed to germinate and sprout and for late rains to nourish the crops so that they grow to maturity. James told us to be patient. He didn't expect the Parousia to be immediate. He hoped that it would be soon but he encouraged patience, just as a farmer must be patient in waiting for the crops to grow. You can't hurry the crops and you can't hurry God. James cautions, "*Be patient, then brothers and sisters, until the Lord's coming ... be patient and stand firm, because the Lord's coming is near.*" And while we are waiting we are told not to "*... grumble against one another...*"

William Barclay ⁽¹⁾ said, "*The farmer needs patience to wait until nature does her work; and the Christian needs patience to wait until Christ comes.*"

“During the waiting [Christians] must confirm their faith. They must not blame one another for the troubles of the situation in which they find themselves ...”

Scripture is clear that no person knows when Christ will come. To speculate about it is meaningless. Barclay goes so far as to call it blasphemous saying *“... for surely no [person] should seek to gain a knowledge which is hidden from Jesus Christ himself and resides only in the mind of God.”*

But scripture also tells us in several places that the Second Coming will happen without warning. It will be as sudden as a lightning bolt and will be totally unexpected when it does happen. There won't be any time to get ready at the last minute. We need to be ready before then.

We need to be like Job who tenaciously clings to his faith in God. We need to persevere. As our scripture reading says, *“... You have heard of Job's perseverance and have seen what the Lord finally brought about.”*

The devotional booklet [These Days](#) (December 12, 2013) commented that *“The letter of James encourages us to follow the farmer's example and wait. It is countercultural to resist leaping over Advent, landing in Bethlehem before the Thanksgiving turkey is served. But just as the crops are the tastiest when ripe, we too, fare better if we spend time waiting [for the Second Coming, as we are] preparing our hearts to [celebrate receiving] the Christ child.”*

We received the Christ child over two thousand years ago and on December 25th we will celebrate the anniversary of that day. We have it on our calendars. It is a given, but the Second Coming is not predictable at all. Our concept of time and God's concept are very different. For us a year may be a long time but for God it is only a fraction of a second.

Humans tend to be impatient over many things but, as Fred Craddock, et al ⁽²⁾, said, *“... if impatience becomes an ingrained pattern of behavior, it is a sure mark of weakheartedness. The true test of strength is to wait before the Lord and let the Lord come when the Lord wills.”*

Genesis tells us that God created the universe and all that is in it in six days --- six of God's days. We know that in our concept of time, creation actually took billions of years for the universe to come into being and for life as we know it to evolve. To God, it

was just six days. To us, it was eons.

God's time is not our time. We can't be impatient. Christ will return, but it will happen in God's good time, not ours.

Thanks be to God. **Alleluia! Amen.**

(1) William Barclay, The Letters of James and Peter, rev. ed., The Westminster Press, Philadelphia, 1976

(2) Fred B. Craddock, et al, Preaching Through the Christian Year, Year A, Trinity Press International, Philadelphia, 1992

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