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St. Barnabas Episcopal Church
1st Sunday of Advent/Year C
December 2, 2018
Text: Luke 21:25-36

The time is now

I think many of us are familiar with Lewis Carroll's classic children's story, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* or *Alice in Wonderland*. Of all the film versions, the 1951 animated film version produced by Walt Disney will always rank first on my list. And of all of the characters in this wonderful fairy tale, the White Rabbit, always keeps my attention. This whimsical creature always makes a rather hurried but memorable entrance wearing its red waistcoat and carrying an oversized pocket watch. And what child, young or old, cannot sing along: "*I'm late, I'm late, for a very important date! No time to say hello, goodbye! I'm late, I'm late, I'm late!*" Alice can't help but follow him, accidentally, of course, down the rabbit hole where she encounters all sorts of wonderful adventures. It doesn't take long to realize that the White Rabbit's propensity for keeping time is the catalyst for moving this marvelous tale along.

While it might be a little odd to compare the two, the Church, also has the propensity or rather the role, in keeping time.

The Church begins its new year with a new lectionary cycle and turns to the Gospel of Luke. And Luke holds no punches in our passage for today. Luke's gospel starts off the season of Advent where Mark's gospel ended just two weeks ago and the extra Sunday in which we celebrated the Feast of Christ the King has not put off the lection that has been set for our hearing today.

Some of us have had more than enough time to recover from our turkey comas; to begin or continue our focus on Christmas. We've already scanned the catalogs and Christmas movies have been showing for weeks and carols have been blaring as well even before Halloween candies and costumes were marked down to their lowest prices to make room on store shelves for everything Christmas. Yes, Christmas, has been shoved in our faces for a while with the message: Buy! Buy! Buy! And so as always, we spend much of the Advent season preparing for Christmas that we often forget that we are preparing for something else. And then as soon as we dare get into that groove-bam! The Church calls us back and the gospel reading for the First Sunday of Advent catches us off guard once again.

Jesus still speaks of terrible things to come—destruction, disruption, confusion, distress, and disasters of every sort. Not exactly words of comfort and joy we'd like to hear during the holiday season. With all the craziness/the madness, the chaos and natural disasters we are presently experiencing, it is easy enough to think the end is near and to lose all hope that God is near or still cares for God's creation. So, is it time to fear or to hope?

In spite of the frightening images and descriptions that Jesus describes in the gospel, the text is not meant for us to live each day examining the skies or cowering in fear and hopelessness but to remind us to always be vigilant, awake, and alert.

Advent is a season that calls us like no other to remember to live into the 'already and not yet'. Advent prepares us for something that has already occurred in our salvation history. Christ has already come into the world. We are already living with the hope and reality of the Incarnation. Emmanuel has already come. God is with us even now. And Advent also helps us to focus on Christ's return in the 'fullness of time', as the apostle Paul wrote. 'Christ will come again' we proclaim.

Until that time, the season of Advent reminds us that something new is about to be birthed all around us. Christ himself is already present and working to restore all creation even as we live today. Advent invites us to journey and join *with* God Incarnate, to vanquish all ills and hurts, to bear witness to the new things God is always doing in the world and within us. To live and hear with faith the promise of a better day, like our ancestors who heard the prophet Jeremiah relay God's message, "*The days are surely coming, says the Lord, when I will fulfill the promise I made to the house of Israel and the House of Judah. In those days and at that time I will cause a righteous Branch to spring up for David; and he shall execute justice and righteousness in the land.*" Yes, "the days are surely coming." And justice and righteousness will one day kiss this earth. And there will be hope for the hopeless. And mercy will be given to those bent low. And divisions will be healed. Things that distract us from God and God's kingdom will all fade away. And love will rule over all.

So stand erect with your heads held high, and watch for the birth of a new world promised. Live like people of hope who have been redeemed. The time is now. Amen.