

## **The Day of the Lord will come**

2 Peter 3:8-15a

A Sermon for the Second Sunday in Advent

In this rather unusual text in 2 Peter, the question is raised: How come it keeps on going? How come life continues as before? After all, the Lord has come. He has sent his Son to die on the cross to settle the whole thing. How come it keeps on going?

One of the answers the author gives, quoting Psalm 90:4, is that God thinks in different kinds of time. One day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day (2 Peter 3:8).

Another answer is: The time delay is due to God's patience. His patience is that he wants other people to come to him. We have various ways in which we have tried to say: This is the way it is and why.

Another way of describing the delay, a way which comes from the Swedish theologian Gustaf Aulén, is that there is a difference between D Day and V Day. When Christ died and rose again that was D Day. When the allied troops landed in Europe in June 6, 1944, it really was over, but it took another year before it was V Day.

Another image is St. George and the Dragon. This image is often found in pictures or statues in Anglican churches. St. George's lance is sticking through the dragon; the dragon is fatally wounded, but you still want to stay out of the way of his jaws and claws because he is still dangerous.

Still another way of dealing with this comes from Jeremiah (18:1-6) and Romans (9:19-24) about the potter and the clay. Who are you? You are clay. How dare you question the potter.

The same is true for an image found in Psalm 139: "The Lord is everywhere. If I ascend to heaven, thou art there. If I make my bed in Sheol, thou art there" (Psalm 139:8). The Lord is with you. That should be enough for you. The same is true in Isaiah 55:8-9: "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, says the Lord." Or in 1 Cor 1:28 where it says that the Lord is able to bring to nothing things that are and to make something out of nothing. That is enough.

The trouble is that none of these pictures really settle the issue because we still ask the question: How is it possible, as life goes on, that there is still evil? There is evil in terrorism, war, human trafficking as well as in nature in droughts, floods, earthquakes pandemics, and the like. There are tragedies in individual lives. How come Lord? You are Lord and you conquered evil?

The problem here is that we haven't quite caught on. We think we're supposed to run the universe, and it's supposed to run our way. We know best. Of course, that it breaking the First Commandment. Nevertheless, we get caught in this idea: "Lord, you are not doing it right. It's not just, not good."

This text from 2 Peter 3 starts at an odd place. It makes better sense if we pick up a few verses ahead of the assigned text where the author first deals with the question: Why hasn't the Lord come back yet? The author is responding to the scoffers who taunted the Christians, saying: "You say he's coming, but the world is continuing on as it always has."

The author of 2 Peter responds by pointing to creation and Noah. He says: By the word of the Lord the world was brought into being out of nothing, and even then the Lord once destroyed it by flood. The one who once destroyed the world by flood (vs 6) will the next time come in fire and judgment (2 Peter 3:7).

The illustration is also pointing out the difference between Noah and those who scoffed at him. He didn't build that boat near the water. He built it out in the middle of the desert. The Lord told him: There was going to be a flood and you should build this boat, and so he did. If we go back to Genesis and read the story, we see that people stood around, scoffed, and laughed. This stupid man was building a boat far from the water, and he says there is going to be a great flood, big enough to float this boat away. And it says they continued to go about their own lives and ignore the warning until the flood came.

It's like what used to happen in a Greek class in seminary. Every day the teacher would give the students a homework assignment of about ten sentences to translate. The next day he would call on students alphabetically to translate one of those sentences. Usually he'd call on students starting at the beginning of the alphabet – Anderson, Benson, Carlson, etc. – but sometimes he'd start toward the end – Stevenson, Thompson, Wilson. Luckily for students whose last name began with K, L, M, and N, he almost never called on them! The students quickly figured out his pattern and adjusted doing the homework accordingly. The students who didn't get called on regularly made fun of those who did. Even though they were all supposed to be prepared every day, they weren't.

Here we are in Advent. Each of these four Sundays the message is a variation of: Be prepared. Watch out. Each Sunday we sing hymns like: "Wake, awake for night is flying!" "Prepare the royal highway; the King of kings is near." But what has happened since last Sunday? Did anybody prepare, watch, think about it? Has it made any difference since last Sunday?

How come we do not prepare ourselves? How come we don't wake up? We live with the idea that there is a kind of luck or fate. We think: "It's by chance," as if that is the way God works.

Even worse is that we take certain Biblical images and misuse them. For example, from Romans 8:17, which says that you and I are made “heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ.” It says very clearly: He has made you his heir. It means you receive his glorious kingdom to come. In the back of our minds, we think: “Hummmmm, if I’m an heir, then I have it made.” We think: “I can presume upon my inheritance. There is nothing God can do about it. He had to do it.”

The other glorious Biblical image is that of adoption. It says: We used to be slaves to the elemental spirits of the universe, but God sent his Son to redeem those under the law that we might be adopted as his sons and daughters (Galatians 4:1-7). We think: “Well, if we’re adopted, God has to take us. We have him over a barrel. He had to do it, and there’s nothing he could do about it.” Again, we presume upon it. We say: “God you better do this and not that, and this is the way it has to be, Lord.”

The Christmas story from the second chapter of Luke tells of the manger and the shepherds, and then it concludes with the angel. There is with the angel a multitude of heavenly hosts praising God and singing: “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among men with whom he is pleased!” (Luke 2:14).

Why are they singing? They have seen that the Lord is solving the problem of sin and death by sending his own Son to die and rise again for us. At the birth of this child, the angels just burst into singing.

What do we do? We have gotten by another week. We have gotten by again so nothing is going to happen. We have escaped being called on. We are like the people of the Old Testament that are called ungrateful, stiff-necked, hard-hearted. We presume upon the Lord.

What is the message? The great message is: In spite of our presumption, in spite of our hard-heartedness, in spite of the fact that we are not grateful, he’s done it. As Paul writes: “For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God” (2 Cor 2:5).

And as Paul writes in Romans 5:6-8: “While we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. (We are the ungodly.) Why, one will hardly die for a righteous man—though perhaps for a good man one will dare even to die. But God shows his love for us in that while we were yet sinners (long before anything we might do) Christ died for us.”

That was his doing, not ours. But thanks be to God! He is the one who does it, in spite of us, and for us. Amen