

COMING SOON

The countdown has begun. It is the first Sunday of Advent, and there are less than 25 days until Christmas.

For a young child, that may seem like "forever."
As one gets older, time moves faster and faster.

~Wasn't just last January that the Olympic torch came through Osler?

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This is an exciting time for children. The hardest part is waiting until Christmas.

To be sure, children don't have to worry about buying and wrapping gifts.

Children don't pay the bills, nor do they cook the meals or concern themselves with all the burdens of consequences and facing the next day.

They really don't have to plan ahead. For the most part, children can indulge themselves,... and more often than parents desire, someone else picks up after them and cleans up their messes.

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But alas,..... time moves on.....Children get older, and eventually real life comes to them--with its worries, work and responsibilities.

Teenagers get a sneak preview. They are in the transition zone with some responsibilities and a few burdens.

Teenagers are a blend, and they can glimpse at what's coming their way, but it's not here yet.

It's a bit like watching a movie trailer. They can glance at a few highlights, and it feels like --Here is your life "Coming Soon" to you.

The mature and well nurtured teen, will begin to make prudent preparations for the age of responsibility, so that when it comes, they will encounter doors instead of walls.

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All three of today's passages deal with time and preparation.

Isaiah 2 opens with the words, "In the days to come."

Coming soon, a new era will arrive.

It will be a time when God's way will be the way of the people, and all will have a desire in their hearts to be with God and to please God.

They will discover that God's way is the way of peace.

They shall beat their weapons into tools of nurture and cultivation,... and,..... and they will never, ever learn war any more.

They will Not do destruction.

They will create and nurture; they will be responsible, good stewards of Life and creation.

\*This is God's will. This is God's vision for humanity..... "In the days to come,..... in the days to come."

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As we know, adults have responsibilities and must deal with consequences,..... and the people did not hold up their end.

Even so, and in spite of the failures, God kept reaching out, and Jesus was yet another bold extension of God's love.

And the followers of Jesus, wondered, "When will the time of fulfillment arrive? When will peace and justice prevail?"

To that Jesus responded, "No one knows the day or the hour."

The Matthew text is about the uncertainty of the "coming of the son of Man", and with that "mystery" is a feel of helplessness from the ambiguity.

Jesus compares "the coming" to the time of Noah, noting that everyone carried on in their normal patterns until the flood arrived, until it was too late.

But, floods are usually like that. Floods are frequently surprises, as what happened in Calgary this past Spring.

These words are Not reassuring, yet in the "thief in the night" analogy, Jesus suggests there is something we can do.

* We can be awake; we can at least be alert, in other words, ready.

Nevertheless, there is an foreboding overtone to Jesus' warning.

An open ended warning, feels threatening.

Moreover, preparation depends on what it is we are expecting.

If we are afraid, then we may hide, run or build up our defences.

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After the First World War, France realized that the vengeful Treaty of Versailles would likely provoke Germany to attack again, someday.

They didn't know when; however, they guessed it was coming sooner than later. So they constructed a formidable line of fortresses along the most logical section of their border to be assaulted. By 1939, the French knew an attack was coming real soon, and they felt secure behind the Maginot line of defences. Yet, in 1940 the Wehrmacht, the German army, discourteously, went around it / they invaded where France was vulnerable.

That's a glaring problem with fortresses--the threat will find weakness,...and it's too bad they all trusted in weapons instead of nurture and creativity.

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Even though, uncertainty is unnerving,...we believe / ..we hope.. the coming of the son of man is a Good thing.

We prepare quite differently when we look forward to the coming / to the guest.

For example, we don't know, exactly, when a baby is going to be born, yet.... we do all kinds of things to be ready / to welcome and to sensitively accommodate the baby.

This kind of preparation and receiving is called Hospitality.

A good host is ready for guest, which includes making sure the home feels comfortable to the guest.

Jessica and my grandson Sasha are coming for Christmas.

The time of their arrival is not a surprise, at least I hope not, and I have 19 more days to be ready.

I plan to be ready. I really want to be ready; it's important to me.

I want them to feel welcomed, at ease and loved.

And, I think I can accomplish that better with two functioning bathrooms, instead of one. I'm doing a reno on the bathroom.

.....still,..... there is more to receiving a much desired visit by a loved one than ease of plumbing access.

I must also prepare myself, too. I want to be in a personal good space. I want them to feel my delight when they are with me.

That's part of the preparation, too.

And,..... it is easier to be ready, when we know the details of when and how.

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This "unknown" coming of the son of man is troublesome.

I think it's safe to assume, even know, that the son of man is Jesus.

Yet, the details are fuzzy.

What if Jesus came today? What would that be like?

What would he think about the condition of God's creation?

Would he be happy that Canada is exploiting the environment?

Would Jesus be glad about Saskatchewan's push for development?

What if he came to church?

Would Jesus check our books to make sure we have a balanced budget?

Would Jesus inspect our building for proper upkeep and maintenance? What would Jesus hope to see?

What would Jesus think of each of us? Would he be pleased?

Would he enjoy being with us?

Are we looking forward to Jesus' presence,.... after all, that does affect how we prepare. Is the thought of Jesus' presence a threat or a delight

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After Jesus left the earth, most of the believers interpreted this coming as THE Second Coming. It was/is called the Parousia.

They thought he would soon return, within days, maybe months.

In Paul's earliest writing, he mentioned the soon return of Christ, yet when the years started rolling by, the understanding of the Parousia changed.

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In Romans 13:11 there is another reference to time.

Paul writes, "...you know what time it is, how it is Now the moment for you to wake from sleep."

Notice the change from *Jesus will soon return*, to the more abstract "the time is Now to wake up."

Paul expands this further when he states, "For salvation is nearer to us, now than when we became believers."

Paul was realizing there is more to this Parousia than Jesus' grand return to earth in bodily form. This was Paul's "wake up call", and part of it was grasping that believing in Jesus was not enough. There is more to salvation / to wholeness than just believing. In addition, Paul grants a helpful insight on how to prepare.

We leave the darkness ; we release the ways of destruction, and....  
We put on the armor of light / take on the light..... "the light".

Of course, light exposes/ reveals, but light is also a symbol of Christ.

Could it be that Paul is suggesting that the arrival of salvation requires the "taking on of Christ"?

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Moreover, from the very beginning, the Greek word "Parousia" was used in connection with Jesus' coming, yet there is some ambiguity with that word.

In the Greek, Parousia can mean "coming" and "presence."

Could it be the "coming of the son of man" is personal?

Perhaps, the coming of the son of man is, as Paul suggests, when we take on the light..... when we take in Jesus.

Maybe, "the coming of Christ" is us--when you and I take on / take in Jesus / when we allow God's Spirit to be our spirit.

This perception resonates with the Isaiah text--the time is coming when the people CHANGE.

Isaiah presents the fulfillment as the condition when we live as God wants us to live / when we live peace and do justice, and when we cease to do and learn destruction.

I think the prophecies are accurate about the Parousia--the earth would tremble and be turned upside down when believers became the presence of Christ.

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The time is coming.....or maybe ... the time is NOW... for us to live in fullness / to not just receive salvation, but to also be the salvation.

Maybe the time is Now for us to be loving, responsible and nurturing adults.

We adults are no longer child.

We adults cannot survive acting like children; our carelessness is wrecking our planet and each other.

Maybe the time is NOW for us to be the salvation / to live as God desires us to live and showed us how through Jesus--the light of the world.

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Advent is a wakeup call--an awakening to the living presence of God.

And, Advent is a prompt to discover the mystery of God's dwelling Now.....with us.

Why would God do such a thing?

What are we missing?

And,.... can you imagine what it would be like if we truly lived what we believed?

Can We imagine what the world would be like if we "believers" lived the salvation.....the son of man here and now!

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Coming Soon.....or NOW?