

# Time's Up

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Isaiah 64:1-9; Mark 13:24-37

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## The Text

### Isaiah 64:1-9

Oh, that you would rend the heavens and come down, that the mountains would tremble before you!

As when fire sets twigs ablaze and causes water to boil, come down to make your name known to your enemies and cause the nations to quake before you!

For when you did awesome things that we did not expect, you came down, and the mountains trembled before you. Since ancient times no one has heard,

no ear has perceived, no eye has seen any God besides you, who acts on behalf of those who wait for him. You come to the help of those who gladly do right, who remember your ways.

But when we continued to sin against them, you were angry. How then can we be saved?

All of us have become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous acts are like filthy rags; we all shrivel up like a leaf, and like the wind our sins sweep us away.

<sup>7</sup> No one calls on your name or strives to lay hold of you; for you have hidden your face from us and have given us over to our sins. Yet you, LORD, are our Father. We are the clay, you are the potter; we are all the work of your hand. Do not be angry beyond measure, LORD; do not remember our sins forever. Oh, look on us, we pray, for we are all your people.

### Mark 13:24-37

“But in those days, following that distress, “the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from the sky, and the heavenly bodies will be shaken.” At that time people will see the Son of Man coming in clouds with great power and glory. And he will send his angels and gather his elect from the four winds, from the ends of the earth to the ends of the heavens. Now learn this lesson from the fig tree: As soon as its twigs get tender and its leaves come out, you know that summer is near. Even so, when you see these things happening, you

know that it is near, right at the door. Truly I tell you, this generation will certainly not pass away until all these things have happened. Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away.

“But about that day or hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. Be on guard! Be alert! You do not know when that time will come. It’s like a man going away: He leaves his house and puts his servants in charge, each with their assigned task, and tells the one at the door to keep watch. “Therefore keep watch because you do not know when the owner of the house will come back—whether in the evening, or at midnight, or when the rooster crows, or at dawn. If he comes suddenly, do not let him find you sleeping. What I say to you, I say to everyone: ‘Watch!’

## The Sermon

### Time's Up

How I dreaded hearing those words.

Time's up. It is time for you to turn in your exam paper. “Finished or not, put down your pens and hand your papers in” announced Miss Donaldson my grade 9 English teacher.

There are occasions in our lives when those words are unwelcome and unexpected announcement. Natural disasters like flood, hurricanes, and earthquakes sound the alarm bell that one's “time is up. “Wars, in which refugees flee for their lives, become a stark reminder that time living in a community is up. Someone in doctor's office is receiving bad news that his or her time is up, or time's up for reconciliation in a failing marriage.

Such words “time up” usually come as unwelcome and unexpected news when someone else announces time is up. Left up to us, if we can be in the driver's seat in determining when our time is up it is usually welcome and expected news. For me the

announcement a couple of weeks to retire from St. Pauls as your minister was my decision to retire before someone else determined when it was time for me to go. Being in control of our destiny is what we desire more than anything else does.

### **Biblical passages announce a “time up”**

On this 1st Sunday in Advent, we listen to both biblical passages affirming “time up” is not within our control. .

Isaiah wishes for “time is up.” The Israelites returned from exile in Babylon. When they return they find that Jerusalem is desolate. The temple is destroyed. They wait for time for God to come to open the heavens and come down and are among them as he was in the old days. They yearn for a time up.

On this 1st Sunday in Advent, Mark’s gospel announces gruesome news about “time is up.” Mark in apocalyptic language meaning "revelation", "an unveiling or unfolding of things not previously known describes what will happen when “time is up”

*The sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light. The stars will fall from the sky and the heavenly bodies will be shaken. Then you will see the Son of man coming in clouds with great power and glory. Then he will send out angels, and gather his elect from the four ends of the earth to the ends of heaven.*

When these things happen, “time is up.”

Gazing into the future, none of us can predict what will happen or when it will happen. Although there is one thing, we can be sure of and it is this: only God knows when our time is up and she is not revealing when or how our “time is up.”

### **Time Out**

Reading in between the lines of Mark’s gospel, before time is up for the Messiah to appear or the kingdom to begin, he suggests that it is time, for a “time out.”

Before time is up, for the Messiah to come, or for the kingdom begin, Mark implies a time out. We speak of time out in sports as a halt in the play. A time out used as a form of discipline among children involves temporarily separating a child from an environment where inappropriate behavior has

occurred and is intended to give an over excited child a time to calm down and cool down. Let me suggest that Mark is encouraging a “time out “before a “time up” to contemplate in our hearts two important considerations.

### **Be alert**

The first is to “be alert.” Take a time out before the time is up to contemplate While in “time out,” as we Three times, Mark mentions it in the reading about taking the time to “keep alert”, “ keep awake”, and “ keep aware” for signs of Christ coming.

Keeping alert is important. Not to be alert at the wheel of a car is to invite an accident.

Not to have your heart and soul alert to Christ coming is to invite the accident of not having him born in your heart.

As we approach the Christmas season, it is difficult to heed the warning of Mark to be alert, awake, and aware to Christ coming. Looking around my neighbors, once again, I see all those symbols of secularization that on the lawns: Santa, reindeers, and sleigh.

Sometimes nestled alongside them is a small and obscure manager scene. Go into many department stores and you hear not Christmas carols but all those sounds of Have yourself a merry Christmas. Amid the letters to Santa, booking Christmas parties and celebrations with family easily slips from our awareness, alertness, and awakens for the reason for the season.

Advent is our time out before the time is up. Each Sunday in the season of Advent, we are given an opportunity to contemplate on the coming of Christ into our world. Our challenge is to keep awake, keep alert, to those signs and symbols that provide an opportunity for a little hope, peace, joy and love to second into what appears to be hopeless, peace less, joyless, and loveless world... If we asleep, we will miss the light from the candles ever penetrating into the darkness of our world.

### **Contemplate death**

Secondly, while in the time out, Mark suggests contemplate death.

When Mark writes “keep watch because you do not know when the owner of the house will come back— whether in the evening, or at midnight, or when the

rooster crows, or at dawn. " He is referring to the passion narratives of Jesus anticipated death. In the evening, a woman anoints Jesus with as a prelude to his death; Jesus struggles with death in garden of Gethsemane, and shares a final meal with his disciples.

As the rooster crows at dawn, Peter crows three denials, which pretext Jesus death. At dawn, Jesus trial before Pilate anticipates his death is nearby. Four incidents in the passion narratives lead up to Jesus death and end in his resurrection.

#### **Into the tomb**

How odd to think about death (Easter) in Advent when the focus is on birth of a Messiah.

With Mark mentioning death for the coming of Christ, I found myself being transported to a death at Christmas Eve, the death of my Dad.

On the day before Christmas at Forest Haven Cemetery, family and friends listened to the trumpet play the last post as my Dad's casket stood in front of us.

As the minister spoke those words that I knew so well at funerals, we on that cold chilly December laid him into a tomb: the cold, dark, and earth. This was stark reality of death on this Christ evening.

No Christmas would ever be the same again for me. My mind and heart, find it difficult to focus the next morning on the birth of a child born in manger. Somewhere along the line, Christmases since that time were marked not by birth but by death and damped not by joy but by grief.

#### **Out of the womb**

While in my time out as I prepared for the Advent message, I found myself staring not only the death of my dad but also the rebirth of new life.

I found myself looking at a picture of Anjee who was eight months pregnant with Dulal. I imagined talking to him in the womb of his mother and telling him that any day now is birth would come but his death. I imagined explaining to him that his time would be up and he would be expelled, kicked out of his mother's womb through a narrow passage or by c-section.

He would dropped out, pulled out by a doctor and be suddenly awaked to the bright lights of an operating room and to the loud sounds of voices. Coming out of the womb and with the cord being cut Dulal and all children are on their own as new life begins.

While in the time out, it made sense to me about death and birth. Into the tomb, my Dad went to experience new life with Christ and out of the womb; my grandson comes to experience new life.

In order for new life to come, a death needs to occur.

I wonder if Mark is suggesting to us that we need to do a little going into the tomb before we can experience the new life from the womb.

I wonder if something needs to die in us, in order for new life to begin. What will need to die in us, in order that we can experience the resurrection, the new birth of Christ being born in our world?

I wonder if this is what Mark is getting at when he talks about death of Christ in order to be prepared for the coming of Christ. .

This is the hope as we begin this Sunday in advent. We hope to die while hoping to live a new life with a baby who shaped the direction of the way we are to live.

The hope of the advent season is that God provides a time out before our time is up to experience the birth of a child.

Hear the closing promise of Jesus, the Son of Man, in light of all that has been said in this marvelous Advent text

"Heaven and earth will pass away,  
but my words will not pass away" (13:31).

The final word of our Advent text is a word of urgency and watchfulness:

Take a time to watch and die in order to give birth and live.