

If Jesus were teaching today, perhaps he would use the Titanic as an analogy a little closer to home than the flood in the time of Noah. The Titanic passengers and crew were sure that they were safe in this unsinkable ship. Just as in the time of Noah, they were eating and drinking and living their lives like nothing was wrong. And nothing was wrong until it hit the iceberg. Just as when there is a flood nothing is wrong until the rain doesn't stop or the waters continue to rise, or for the people of the Italian island of Ischia this week, until there was a sound like thunder and mud came rushing down the hill. And some people were saved and others were not.

Since the 17th century today's gospel reading has been combined with others to create a theory of the rapture where the ones who are saved are taken up into the air to meet Jesus and the rest are left behind. But you will notice that in the reading itself no mention is made of why one person is taken and another not. In fact, the Greek is sufficiently ambiguous that it might mean that one is taken somewhere and the other, the one left behind, is forgiven.

When there is a disaster there are often survivors. One dies and another does not and we don't know why. And maybe there is no why. Maybe that is just part of living a mortal life on this planet.

But we don't want that to be true. We don't want to think about death or disaster, and so like the people on the Titanic, we eat and drink and make love and check the internet and try not to pay attention to the fragility of human life, to the probability that things will end, that change may come suddenly.

Yet Jesus says, be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an unexpected hour. Be ready.

That is the theme of Advent. In the reading from Romans, Paul said "the night is far gone, the day is near. Let us then lay aside the works of darkness and put on the armor of light" Get ready.

About 15 years ago, we had an art exhibition here in the church. Bob Pelfrey was good enough to arrange for work by local artists to be hung on the walls, and the local paper – I think it was the Sun Bulletin back then – took a photo of Bob and me looking up at the paintings. But in the photo you couldn't see what we were looking at, we just appeared to be staring up into space. So then we had a caption contest – who could come up with the funniest caption for the picture. And the winner was Bob who put “Jesus is coming, look busy!”

Advent is not about getting busier, though I know we all are, busy getting ready for Christmas whatever that means for us.

The theme of Advent is Jesus is Coming! Be ready.

I am a habitual procrastinator. I work well under pressure and often leave things until the last minute. But that also means that I don't always plan well and find myself late and having to wing it more often than I would like. If I were to have a motto it might be “never do today what can be put off until tomorrow.”

Which is the total opposite of Jesus' message today. The Son of Man is coming at an unexpected hour. Be ready!

What does being ready for the Son of Man's appearance mean?

It will mean different things for each of us. *What has God been saying to you that you have been ignoring, or that you have put off until you have more time, more energy, more focus?

Immediately before the short passage we heard from Romans, Paul told his readers to love their neighbors. And now he says, *“...lay aside the works of darkness and put on the armor of light; let us live honorably as in the day, not in reveling and drunkenness, not in debauchery and

licentiousness, not in quarreling and jealousy. Instead, put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires.”

Paul is always practical. We need to do the deep inner work that comes when we put on the armor of light but the way that will show in the world is that we love our neighbor and give up drunkenness, quarreling and jealousy.

When we hear Paul talk about the flesh we have been trained to think about sexual desire but “flesh” is a much wider concept. *Paul contrasts flesh and Spirit. For Paul, flesh is not just physical but is a blanket term to describe all the human traits that get in the way of our being one with the God of peace. Flesh includes jealousy, quarreling, backbiting, negativity, gossip, judgmental thoughts, divisiveness, complaining as well as the big sins like theft, murder and corruption. The Spirit in contrast is “love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. “(Gal 5:22,23)

So to put on the armor of light is to embrace and practice the fruits of the Spirit. If you’re like me, that requires constant practice, prayer and vigilance.

People of God, we are called to be aware. We are called to be alert. We are called to be mindful of the icebergs of our times – climate change, migration and the threat to democracy. And to know that they all have the same root, the same cause – and that is the works of darkness. Our task is to resist – *to put on the armor of light. Our task is to live in the Spirit.

How is the Holy Spirit prompting you? Where are you procrastinating? What do you need to do to be ready for the coming of the Son of Man, whether the child in the manger or the glorious appearance in the clouds?

The time is now.

*The Advent course we are using this year invites us to wake up to simple living – living that is focused and free from the distractions of “the flesh” - wealth, luxury, excess, complexity, distraction, multiplicity, dissolution.

I think there is something in this for us as a church community as well as for us as individuals. *In this time of transition, we are called to refocus on the essentials, to redefine what is at the very core of our communal life in Christ, what it is that gives us life. And that of course is the Christlife coursing through us, the Spirit refining and defining us as the Body of Christ in this place.

At the earlier service, Lorienne pointed out that the *qualities of the Spirit are the qualities which build community, which make us a resilient community of Christ. So as we put on the armor of light personally we will also do it in community, choosing that which builds up not that which destroys. Choosing Spirit over “flesh”.

*Together we are called to put on the armor of light, to wake up and walk together in the light of Christ.

As Jesus said, “Keep awake... for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming.”

*It is Advent, it is time.