

1st Sunday of Advent

Text: Luke 21:25-36

Preacher: The Rev. R. Bruce Todd

St. Peter's - Lafayette Hill, PA.

November 29, 2009

“What Time is It?”

Have you ever noticed how uncomfortable people are when nothing is going on? We don't know what to do with silence. The great pianist Rachmaninoff tells of giving a piano recital when he was very young. He began with a Beethoven sonata that had several long rests in it. During one of those long rests, a motherly lady leaned forward, patted Rachmaninoff on the shoulder, and said kindly: “Honey, play us something you know.”

There is an awkwardness in silence, in waiting. Think about a first date? Do you remember those long, painful periods of silence while riding together in the car? We are not very good at handling silence. It's awkward, confusing, uncomfortable. We are not very good at waiting. A man was in a restaurant. A waiter was passing by. “Excuse me,” said the man, “but how long have you been working here?” “About a year,” replied the waiter. The man said wearily, “In that case it couldn't have been you that took my order.”

Waiting is no fun. Over the next few weeks our children will become restless with expectation and excitement waiting on the coming of Christmas. It's the same way with the people of God. The Old Testament concludes with the people of Israel waiting on a coming Messiah. The New Testament ends with the followers of Jesus waiting for his return. We have been waiting now for more than 2,000 years. Waiting isn't easy to do. Just watch other people who are waiting - waiting in the longest line at the grocery store; waiting in their car at a toll booth; waiting for a train that's 3 minutes late; waiting for their Grande Chai Tea latte. We don't like waiting! And if we can't be patient and wait for these kinds of things, how can we ever be expected to be patient and be ready for when Christ returns?

After 14 years of studying the Bible, scholar William Miller became convinced that Christ would return in 1843. When Miller announced April 3rd as the day, some of his followers went to mountaintops, hoping for a head start to heaven. Philadelphia society ladies clustered together outside of town to avoid entering God's kingdom with the common herd. When April 4th dawned as usual the Millerites were disillusioned, but they took heart. Their leader had predicted a range of dates for Christ's return. They still had until March 21st 1844. The devout continued to get ready, but again they were disappointed. A third date, October 22nd 1844 was set, but it also, obviously, passed.

We had people determined that the end times would be at the turning of this past millennium. Now the date of 2012 even has Hollywood getting into the “predicting the end-of-the-world” business. Where did this date come from? In the much-studied (but not easily-understood) Long Count calendar from the ancient Mayan culture of Central America, the