

Advent 1 (C)
Luke 21:25-36

The days between Thanksgiving and Christmas form a season of the year when most of us are acutely concerned about time! Maybe it's because there are so many things to do between now and Christmas that we're afraid that we won't have enough time. Maybe it's because, whether it's for parties or because of end of the year projects at work, it feels like everyone wants a piece of our time. And maybe it's just because as the days grow shorter, it seems like time is running out more quickly each and every day.

Time is an issue for almost all of us these days. And indeed, time can be an issue even when it's not this season. We wonder how much time we have. We're afraid we won't have enough time. And we get stressed when it feels like time is running out.

And often, "time" is an elusive concept. When I wonder whether I have enough time, or when people ask me if I have time for something, it isn't always just a question of how many hours are on the clock. Sometimes the question of time is more than just hours and minutes. Often, time is measured in:

- A) the ability to concentrate – haven't you ever told someone, "I don't have time to think about this now?"; that doesn't usually mean that you can't find 5 minutes on the clock to think about a new question, it's just that you know that you already have so many things to think about that you won't be able to focus adequately on the question at hand ...
- B) emotional stamina – haven't you ever told someone, "I don't have time to deal with this?"; You may have the clock hours required to do something, but if you're too drained from everything else, you know that the "time" you have won't be the kind of productive time you need ...
- C) physical stamina – I know that sometimes, I may have clock time left, but if I'm physically drained, I know it's "time" to stop ... (this is really important to recognize when skiing!)

In this season of Advent, we'll find that many of our Bible readings also speak

about time. Time was an important thing back then. It mattered greatly to early Christians. And in the Bible, time is sometimes an elusive concept as well.

For example, in today's Gospel reading, Jesus is speaking to his first followers about time. Jesus' words seem to be about the end of time. And although not asked directly by the disciples in this case, Jesus speaks about recognizing the signs of the times, even though he doesn't tell them how much calendar time they have until some of these things take place. And finally, he tells his disciples of every age to "be alert at all times."

But what does "time" mean here? And what can it mean to be "alert at all times"? Truthfully, whenever I read those words, it stresses me out! And that's because readings like this always seem to come up during Advent, when I'm short of time. And it seems like Jesus wants me to get even less sleep than I'm getting already. Instead, it sounds like I'm supposed to stay up all night praying, instead of getting a good night's sleep!

And the meaning of "time" in the Bible is even more complicated because in New Testament Greek there are, in fact, two words for "time." The first is "chronos", from which we get the English word, "chronology." It refers to clock time and calendar time. If you just want to know if there are physically enough hours left on the clock, you ask about "chronos."

The other word for time is "chairoi". But "chairoi" isn't about clocks or calendars. It's asking whether "this is the right time" to do something. And it would be used in phrases like, "the times we live in." I knew a Pastor once who illustrated the difference by telling us the story of the time at 3 am when he was awaked by his pregnant wife who simply told him, "it's time!" And that had nothing to do with the hour on the clock...

And it's this word "chairoi" that Jesus uses when he talks about time and calls us to be alert. His call isn't to stay up every night and never sleep. Jesus isn't even talking about clock or calendar time. Instead, Jesus means that we should be alert to what God is doing in our lives at every time. Jesus means that we should be open to God's call to action in every season. And Jesus means that we should be expecting God to act, no matter what the calendar or the clock may say.

And just as "clock time" can slip away from us, not simply because the minutes run out but because of mental, emotional and physical stress, so too, we can miss

out on the “chairoi” of God’s time if we become too weighed down with distractions. And Jesus’ words in today’s Gospel reading are words of caution not to miss out on what God is doing and what God is calling us to be part of because we get too weighed down with:

- A) mental exhaustion – in spite of Jesus’ words that many of us heard again on Thanksgiving Eve from the Sermon on the Mount, many of us still believe, deep down, that worrying will somehow help! In fact, worrying about things we can’t fix or control takes our attention from things we can figure out how to fix. And this is the reason Jesus cautions us against it ... (Consider how easy it is to miss the message of Jesus’ coming again into our lives because we’re too busy remembering holiday “to do” lists...)

- B) emotional exhaustion – the word “dissipation” in Greek probably most clearly translates as “hung over” (or perhaps, too stuffed from Thanksgiving dinner!) You’re no longer physically drunk, but you just can’t rise to the occasion... (For many people, this is a season of a lot of family and personal stress; And sometimes, dealing with the stress is so exhausting that it becomes difficult to experience the joy that people under intense stress so badly need ...)

- C) physical exhaustion – in the Bible, being “drunk” was a problem because it made you physically unable to work, and therefore to help and defend your neighbors in need... (Consider how easy it is to be so worn down by Christmas shopping and running around to get what we need for holiday celebrations that when Christmas comes, we’re too tired to celebrate Jesus’ birth ...!)

We may be more acutely aware of how we can become weighed down and distracted in the time before Christmas. But in fact, every time and every season is a time and a season in which God is acting. Every time and every season is an opportunity for us to see and experience God’s presence in our lives and in the world around us. And every time and every season is a moment in which God is calling us to be part of what he’s doing in the world.

And in every time and every season, there’s a danger that we’ll become weighed down and distracted. And so in this season of Advent, Jesus calls us to be alert to how the things that weigh us down can keep us from experiencing the joy of God’s

time. In this season of Advent, Jesus calls us to struggle against the things that weigh us down by looking for what God is doing in this and every season. And in this season of Advent, Jesus promises us again that God's *chairoi* time is always right now – and that God is inviting each and every one of us to live more fully into the time God is giving us right now.

Amen.