

All Saints Steenrijk Episcopal Church

Willemstad, Curacao

The First Sunday of Advent (A):

November 27, 2022

A Sermon by the Rev. Joseph Parrish

DRAFT

“Christ Came; Now What?”

**The Holy Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ
according to Matthew 24:36-44**

But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father only. As were the days of Noah, so will be the coming of the Son of man. For as in those days before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and

giving in marriage, until the day when Noah entered the ark, and they did not know until the flood came and swept them all away, so will be the coming of the Son of man. Then two men will be in the field; one is taken and one is left. Two women will be grinding at the mill; one is taken and one is left. Watch therefore, for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming. But know this, that if the householder had known in what part of the night the thief was coming, he would have watched and would not have let his house be broken into. Therefore you also must be ready; for the Son of man is coming at an hour you do not expect.

Dear Lord, help us to keep ready for the coming of your kingdom and to join in Your Movement, for only in you do we live and move and have our being. Amen.

Much of Christianity turns quickly this week to begin the celebration of Christmas, singing carols, putting up a Creche, tidying up the wings of the children's Christmas angel, and so on. Yet catholic and orthodox Christianity trudge on with the end of the world scenarios, trying to move us forward rather than backward in 'real time'. As we all know,

Jesus was here and now is gone, at least physically gone, and that has been the case for about two thousand years. But much of Christ's followers were so enamored by Christ's presence that it seems they did not want to give any other focus than a focus on the little baby in the wooden crib, and Christmas began to be celebrated in the fourth century.

When after I moved to New York I went to my old home in Knoxville, Tennessee, for Christmas with my family, boom, the Christmas lights would be down if I missed Christmas by one day. It was a bit of a shock the first time that happened,

but then I quickly learned that Santa had replaced Jesus, and Santa had gotten tired of hearing all those requests from children at the Mall, or where ever, and no one could get much of a crowd to sit in Santa's lap on December 26. Of course, we Episcopalians mentally understand that scenario, but we too get caught up in celebrating Christmas during Advent. Besides, many of these dire Advent stories sound so distant from us. The wars are all 'over there', and we sit comfortably in our cushy chairs in the evenings watching old Christmas films, if that, and moaning about how the price of everything at the

Mall has gone up so much and wondering if the children will notice the struggle their parents are having trying to buy more with less, and shuddering should the children begin to compare this year's Christmas toys with last years, or forbid that they just might start comparing their toys with a few other neighborhood children that seem always to have out-gifted our children.

I recall my neighbor Jimmy who always was able to outdo what I had gotten for Christmas. My family included two other brothers, and Jimmy was an only son. My train set had two or three new cars, but Jimmy's had a moveable

beacon on one of his new cars, and an engine that spewed a cloud of white smoke. I always had the standard O gauge track, but Jimmy graduated to the smaller OO gauge and so on.

Of course, both of our churches sang Christmas carols from the beginning of December if not before, and Christmas was ‘old hat’ the Day after Christmas.

Sure there were often wars ‘over there’, but they were far away, and we could only watch the advance of our troops at a very great distance. Joy was always the theme of early December until Christmas Day, even if our parents tried to hide their

struggles to make our Christmas better than last year's. And sometimes we found that Santa was making rounds with his toys a little too early and stuffing them up into the hallway closets with a mysterious sets of clothing or whatever trying to hide those little things from my little eyes. It was how Santa could somehow bring the big things on Christmas Eve, like a tricycle or even a bicycle right before Christmas morning that mystified us. Santa's tiny sleigh could hold the big things of Christmas, but he came earlier than Christmas to bring the little things. It was a mystery that we could not fathom,

but we just were blaming the ‘mystery’ of Christmas for all these odd happenings. Then as we got older, something would happen and we would discover our parents playing with our grandparents with the toys Santa brought the night before. Ah, we ‘found out’ Santa, and we were crushed. Santa’s magic suddenly wore off.

Growing up is not an easy thing to do. And no wonder teenagers become a bit bitter about every thing; we could not even trust Santa, for crying out loud. So how could we possibly trust Mom and Dad? So we formed our own support groups,

sometimes to our detriment, and church attendance was a thing of the past by the time we are fourteen years old. If we can't trust Mom and Dad and Santa, who could we trust?

Then some of us began to explore larger parts of our country and of our world, and we find some others who never celebrated Christmas. One of my professors never saw a chair until he was fourteen years old. His village was and is very poor. Every year we find new things about the world we never knew before. The riches of America and Europe were so overwhelming to the rest of the world that

we always would instill both jealousy and also a sense of everyone else wanting a Santa like ours. Our Santa became the object of focus and of desire. And ‘they’ always became a bit jealous of our riches beyond any belief. And even our belief’s became an object of their underlying hatred of us in rich America and rich Europe or rich somewhere else.

So now in my own lifetime I have begun to understand how much of the world came to hate the generic ‘me’. And their struggle against my presumed riches becomes a convoluted struggle against me somehow.

I hesitate to make that big of a deal about it, but Advent may be my salvation, in some sort of global sense. If I bring my Christmas down a notch or two, then maybe I have the hope of possibly convincing others outside of my comfortable Christianity that my Jesus is a good person, that Christ really did die to save us from our sins. But it's a bit of a struggle.

Macy's wants me to stay in line and celebrate the Macy's Christmas because about eighty percent of all department store sales happen between Thanksgiving and Christmas in the US and much of

elsewhere, even in countries who do not have the Christian faith. If Macy's suffers a loss on Christmas, democracy is dead, or so we are taught to believe, and there are firm statistics to show that to be the case. If we did away with Christmas, what else can we depend on to spend our end of year savings?

As a result, Halloween is slowly becoming the season that the world can celebrate. And now Christmas sales begin in October, no longer holding off until December. It's an odd thing, believe you me.

I guess I must be getting old since I do not find any joy in celebrating Halloween. And some non-Christians see a bit of a Christian slant in Halloween and want us to put Santa back in Christmas.

So we are caught between the taint of Halloween and the struggle to have a big Christmas. What is the world coming to?

Maybe Advent can save us, I don't know. But at least maybe we should give it a try.

The cleverer Episcopalians have somehow convinced a few children that we can buy more things with less money after Christmas. And we are focused on

wealth and keeping wealth once we have made it. So less spending in Advent seems a good thing to do, but it is a scary feeling. Suppose the hot Christmas toy or clothing or jewelry are not on sale, then what? Will our Christmas be ruined?

Oh, we of little faith. Jesus loves us too.

This Advent, maybe we do not want to harp on what happens if the little nuclear weapons come out to play. Maybe we may be even spared that another few years, or at least this year. But toys are toys and boys are boys, and boom, boom, boom is somehow in our blood. If we

can't blow up something big every few years, then life is not worth living. And we have really big bombs going to waste in all those silos in Kansas and Siberia. Boom, boom, boom.

Oddly, the use of these little bombs in the Ukraine will affect more Russian lives than Ukrainian lives due to the way the fallout falls out. When Chernobyl went up in 1986, half the thyroid deaths in the world were in Russia. Of course the other half was spread throughout the rest of the world. And anyone who was born in 1986 and afterwards seem to have many more 'ideopathic' diseases that our grandparents

and parents had. But we lived during a time when every square inch of both America and Europe is more highly radioactive than any other time in history. So our cancers seem to be outstripping most every other disease, even heart disease at times. Gamma and beta emissions do that.

If it was in our peas and carrots, it was surely also in our chickens and pigs and cows.

Maybe this generation will not add to the earth's background radiation, but that remains to be seen.

Advent might be our Savior's savior. If we can tamp down our tendency to want a bigger and more glorious Christmas, maybe, just maybe, we will save the world.

That may be too much to ask.

But maybe if we begin to focus on what we can give away, give far away, this Christmas season, let us call it the Advent season, let us call it whatever, the 'giving away' season, then maybe we can save the world and our very own souls.

With God's help we can do much.

Amen.

“Christ Came; Now What?”

Description: Christmas is a time of giving, mostly to ourselves. But maybe Christmas can become a time of giving to others, especially to others struggling mightily just to survive. Advent may be the season we need.

Tags: Jesus, Lord, God, Santa, Christmas, Advent, giving, radioactive, cancer, salvation