

# Sermon Text for December 1, 2019

*by Rev. Robert K. Bronkema*

Isaiah 2:1-5, Matthew 24:36-44

**“Not the kind of second coming that you would expect.”**

I hope you all had a wonderful Thanksgiving. The Bronkemas went to Newtown Square and 21 of us gathered at my brother's house. Part of our tradition is whenever we are together a competition breaks out and usually one of the 4 brothers wins while the 10 children between us don't. This year for ping pong around the world and two rounds of knockout the youngest child who is 14 won them all. It was not what we expected.

But then when we played 10 children against 3 adults in full court basketball the world came back to order and the adults won as they have every year. We find ourselves in the lectionary again and away from Luke and into Matthew on this first Sunday of Advent. Last week we saw a king which we did not expect, a humble servant who went to the cross to die as opposed to the current cultural expectations and reality of what a king should be and is.

Today we address one of the central tenets of Christian thought which is the second coming of our Savior King Jesus and once again we see a second coming that we would not expect or anticipate. In Advent we find ourselves in a season of expectation, of anticipation, of hope for better things to come. Last week Pilate's questions to Jesus: are you a king? This question provided a backdrop to Jesus' answer of yes, but not the kind of king you would expect.

Similarly, this week the disciples at the beginning of this chapter draw Jesus aside and ask him privately, so when exactly are you going to come back again and what should we expect as far as the time and the season when you will come back? This question, once again, sets the stage for Jesus' answer which is one we would not expect and so diametrically opposite to what the status quo Christina thought is today in regards to what people expect in the second coming. Our task is to understand Scripture today, to understand the second coming as defined by Jesus and not a Christianity which has power on their mind, and prove with our actions and active preparation our wakefulness for the second coming of Christ.

## **READ**

The Isaiah Scripture that we read is a very common and classic one for Advent. Isaiah speaks of the coming of the Messiah, on this side of history we would say the coming of Christ, as saying: “In the days to come...” Last week I referred to Matthew 25 as a picture of what our

king wants from us, but that is in the midst of a separation of sheep and goats in the second coming. That is our common understanding of Jesus' second coming that it will be predicated on judgment. That is what will drive the second coming, according to our expectations, a division and a judgment between who is in and who is out.

I know when I spent a year at Philadelphia College of Bible before I went to Swarthmore there were courses and maybe even a major in dispensationalism which is the study of basically trying to predict when and even where Jesus will come back. Our Scripture in Matthew and many like it are used to prove that there will be a rapture and then a period of suffering or a period of suffering and then a rapture and people really felt strongly about this and even argued vehemently about this. Let me tell you simply, not only does it not matter, but the point of all of it is that we will never know until it happens, so our task is to be awake.

Isaiah moves completely away from any of this hypothetical posturing and paints a picture that we would not expect in vs.2 that speaks of all the nations coming to the Lord and then again an appeal in vs.5 to: Come, let us walk in the light of the Lord. We expect judgment and division and rapture and miracles, but instead Isaiah presents a picture of inclusivity and an overarching theme of peace as opposed to division. We may expect the final battle in the second coming but Isaiah tells us the instruments for battle will be transformed into farming tools so that we can all work together on God's land. And war, by the way, will no longer be taught or learned.

That's Isaiah presenting a very unexpected picture of the second coming of our Savior. When we get to Matthew, a bit of a different picture is portrayed yet once again. Like we saw in Luke last week we find here at the beginning of this chapter, in 24:3, the disciples ask Jesus **READ**. And instead of giving them the specifics he lays out generalities which are meant to motivate them to a specific action which is wakefulness. He tells them: Stay Awake!! And why stay awake?

Because Jesus' coming is going to happen just like God's providential action took place in the days of Noah. So, what were the day of Noah like? Let's read in Genesis 6:5. This is what it will be from our end. Okay, that sounds about right, you may say. The people were so focused on their own desires, on their own agendas that they fell asleep in keeping what the king says is most important to him. Remember Matthew 25? What is the most important thing for the king, you know the king that we didn't expect? We are to keep awake by doing those things

that the king, who is coming back, wants us to do in order to come back in a manner that is totally unexpected. The people in Noah's days were so focused on eating and drinking that when the flood came they were swept away. They could care less for the poor, the hungry, the thirsty, the naked, the immigrant, the ones in prison.

What about us today? Are we not so focused on proving that our side is right that we have become so myopic that all historical perspective has been lost. We think we are living in days that no one has ever seen before. Who remembers when our government killed shot students at Kent State University? Who remembers when we had riots in our streets because we were so divided. I pray that those days do not return. But we are so intent on our side winning that we are convinced that the other side is so bad that history has never experienced anything like the times in which we are living. Come on, that is a statement of pride if I ever heard one.

We are so focused on solely making sure that our side wins that we miss what our Lord requires and the type of kingdom which will come. We eschew taking a stance because we say all people are corrupt so we are left with the choice of having to choose to support those who are corrupt thinking that somehow this has no effect on our eternal status.

We don't realize that how we understand the future requires a union between our hope for the future and our present day ethics. There is a disconnect between these two which leads to puzzling support of incredibly unethical conduct and theological stances. Our hope ought to shape our ethic. I am disappointed in Christians who disconnect our future hope as described in Isaiah with our present reality which must be based on our expectation of the second coming.

Jesus will come back but he will come back in a second coming that we will not expect. We think what we do today and in this cultural context will not affect how he views us, but we are wrong because many of us are asleep in our support of action which takes us away from the picture described in Scripture.

Do you notice how Matthew describes Jesus in his coming back? As a thief and so we do not know when he will come. Not an analogy that I would choose to describe my Savior, but it is less a description of his character and more a description of our need to be awake and prepared at all times and that our actions and preparedness need to correspond to the picture of the second coming as described here.

Today, we celebrate communion together on this first Sunday in Advent. Communion is the most intimate act that we do as a family. This act of sharing this meal together describes our

expectation, our preparation, our hope for the coming of our Savior. Communion is a sign and a symbol of our preparation. Jesus dies as a servant king, the type of king that we do not expect. He promises to return in a way that produces peace and justice as opposed to division and warfare. Not what we would expect, either.

Our role is to stay awake and our wakefulness ought to be driven by a praxis which is centered on leading our culture to a counter cultural push toward peace, toward caring for all people, toward caring what we say and what we do and who we support, because it actually matters to the one who has our eternity in his hands. Amen.