

A Sermon Preached by Gregory Hall at Clarence Presbyterian on November 27, 2022

THE TWO MINUTE WARNING

Keep awake therefore, for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming.
Matthew 24:42

One of my favorite Professors in college came from what was commonly known as an old money family. They had a summer place in the Hamptons that was in the family for many generations. The house was set back from the ocean and protected by a large dune. My professor's grandfather had built a large platform deck in order to sit on lounge chairs and look at the ocean.

One day a friend of his grandfather's came to visit who was quite a religious conservative. He looked at the deck and said, "Merrill what a great place to watch for the second coming."

In recent times many Christians have not often thought about the second-coming of Jesus. So often we mainline Christians tend to think that the Second Coming of Jesus is best left to the television preachers who seem to want to frighten people into faith. There is a veritable industry of books and movies that focus on the end times. We Presbyterians tend to want to let those we call fundamentalists handle the Second Coming; we will focus on the here and now.

This is possible for us to do almost every Sunday of the year. But then we approach the First Sunday of Advent and the assigned readings from Matthew, Mark and Luke. The Gospels will not let us forget this teaching. They point us to the second coming of Jesus. They remind us that Christ himself is the source of this teaching. Jesus told his disciples that at some time in the future, a time that he was not even sure about himself, the Son of Man would come in power. The second coming described by Christ was different from the first. The second coming will not be a quiet event in a manger in Bethlehem. Jesus will not be coming to play a part in human history. He will be coming to bring down the curtain on history. When he comes even time will be no more.

One of the earliest prayers of the Christian Church was, "Come Lord Jesus." Each time we celebrate the Lord's Supper we hear these words, "As often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim his death until he comes. In the creed we proclaim our faith that **He will come again**.

Yet we mainline Christians continue to feel a little uncomfortable with this idea of the Second Coming of Jesus. One of our reasons for our discomfort is the question of relevance. We can sometimes wonder how this teaching should influence our life today?

This morning I would ask you to use your imaginations and think of the Doctrine of the Second Coming using an analogy from football. It may sound trite, but I believe that the concept of the second coming of Jesus can be spiritually understood as God's two-minute warning.

Most of you football fans understand what the two-minute warning is. With two minutes left before the end of the first half or the end of the game, the officials call a time out. They officially notify the teams that there are only two minutes left to play.

The warning often changes the way the game is played. With time running out the team that has the ball plays a very different game. This is called the hurry-up offensive or the two-minute drill. The team with the ball does not go into a huddle after each play. They seldom call running plays that might waste the clock. The passing game changes as receivers run sideline patterns in order to get out of bounds and stop the clock. It is not uncommon for an offense, that has been totally inept during the whole game, to move the ball the length of the field in the final two minutes. The realization that time is running out focuses their energy.

I believe that one function of the Second Coming is to focus our attention. The doctrine causes us to focus on the question, "Are we truly seeking to be the person God intends for us to be, today?"

A fable is told of three apprentice devils that were coming to Earth to finish their apprenticeship. They were talking to Satan, the king of the devils, about their plans to tempt and ruin humanity.

The first said, "I will tell them there's no God."

The Devil said, "No, that is not going to work. People know there is a God."

The second one said, "I will tell them there's no Hell."

"No," the Devil said, "Most people, deep down in their hearts, know there is a Hell and a judgment to come."

The third said, "I will tell them there's no hurry."

"Go," said Satan, "and you will ruin them by the thousands."

When we believe that we have all the time in the world, we just do not get things accomplished. We tend to put things off. We say we will get around to it someday. We put off doing things we would like to do. We say things such as:

Some day I would like to learn to play a musical instrument.

Someday I should learn a foreign language.

Some day I would like to learn to play tennis.

Some day I would like to visit San Francisco.

We also put off doing things we know we ought to do.

I should start to exercise more some day.

I should eat a better diet some day.

The problem is that some day never comes.

This same truth is demonstrated in our relationship with God. Most Americans are not unbelievers. Almost every opinion poll finds that a vast majority of Americans believe in God. Most have faith in Jesus. Most trust in Jesus' promise of eternal life.

The problem with most of us is not a lack of belief but rather a lack of action. We just are not concerned with our spiritual life. We allow our everyday concerns to crowd out our focus on things of the spirit. We can become so overwhelmed with our everyday responsibilities to family, work and recreation that we put off thinking about our faith.

We know we need to start praying more some day.

We realize that we ought to learn more about Scripture some day.

We want to give more of our time in service to others someday.

One of these days we will begin to worship more regularly.

But again, that day never seems to come.

When we are faced with limited amounts of time, it focuses our energy and makes us choose priorities.

On almost every college campus today this dynamic is at work. Students know that all their assignments will be due before Christmas recess. It is amazing how deadlines help focus one's concentration.

The doctrine of the Second Coming reminds us that our time on earth is limited. Christ may come at any time. Jesus himself said **Even the Son of Man does not know the day or the hour.** Even if Christ does not return in our lifetime, we still do not know how long we have on this earth. We do not know the day or hour of our own death.

The first Sunday of Advent reminds us that time is running out on us.

Two weeks ago, I was sent an obituary of an Elder from the Church in Dansville who died at the age of 94. It reminded me that thirty-eight years ago, I was working on a committee of the Presbytery of Genesee Valley with her. She was a retired schoolteacher. I was 29 or 30 at the time. During a break in our work she said to me, "Greg at your age you just do not understand. Life is so short. My time is running out. There is just so little time and so much to do."

She was correct. She was not just speaking for herself, but for all of us. There is limited time. We do not know the day nor the hour when it will all be over for us. Therefore, we cannot put off being faithful to Christ.

There are many people who act as if there are no limits built into their lives. There are many who act as if this present life will go on forever and ever. They have not faced the truth that for each one of us time will run out.

On this first Sunday of Advent we are reminded that our deadline is approaching. The limits of our lives are very real. Our time on earth is running out. This truth thrusts on us some pointed questions.

If Christ came back today would you be ready?

If you died this very day would you be satisfied with the choices you have made in your life?

Several years ago, C-Span covered a National Press Club Dinner honoring the lifetime achievements of Robert Novak. Robert Novak was a syndicated columnist and talk show pundit whose views earned him the nickname the Prince of Darkness. The function of the dinner was both to honor and roast Novak.

One of the last speakers of the evening was Fred Barnes. He concluded with his favorite story about Novak. Apparently, several years before some of Novak's friends began encouraging him to take Christianity seriously. He had lived his life as part of the jaded cynical world of journalism. He had never been a believer.

A year or more before this roast, Novak had a speaking engagement at Syracuse University. During the evening there was a reception at which Novak had a conversation with a senior at the University. The conversation got around to religion.

She asked Novak if he was religious? He said not really but he had started going to worship some to learn more about Christianity.

She said, "What are you going to do about it?" He replied "Nothing."

She asked Bob "How old are you?" and he told her.

She then said to him. "You don't have much time!"

While this exchange sounds humorous, when Bob Novak returned to Washington the next day he called the priest of the Church he had been attending. He began instruction and several months later he was baptized and received into the Church.

The first Sunday of Advent reminds us of the truth that for all of us the time is limited. It is our Two-Minute warning. It asks us not to allow our day-to-day activities blinds us to God's presence. It calls on us to struggle each day to become more faithful to Jesus.

If you think you should pray more, begin today!

If you feel that you should read more Scripture, begin now!

If you know that you should be more faithful in worship,
start today!

If you are called to forgive and be reconciled to
someone, start this afternoon!

You and I can begin this very day to take practical steps to become the person God wants us to be. There is no better day to begin growing in our faith than today.

For time is running out. This is what Jesus is teaching us when he said, **Keep awake therefore, for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming.** This is our two-minute warning.