

“Hope in God’s Change”
Romans 13:11-14;
Matthew 24:36-44

November 27, 2016
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I do think about how, at the beginning of Advent, there is this yearning for, this looking forward to the Christmas to come. It is in that thinking forward that I was thinking backward, thinking about those early days when Christ first came. People had no idea he was coming. There was this unexpectedness of his entry into the life of humanity. There wasn’t a sense of yearning that came because of what was coming, but there was a yearning for a change. There was a yearning, a hoping for God to intervene in the oppression that they felt and the understanding they had that life wasn’t right. They had that kind of yearning.

I think that our passages help us think about that kind of yearning; a yearning for things to be better, a change to come. The struggle we have is that when we yearn for a change, when we want change, it doesn’t always work out in the ways we want it to when we take charge.

November 9th and 10th were the 78th anniversary of *Kristallnacht*. It was a time when people wanted change and did it in a very terrible way. It was the beginning of a slide into genocide. That was a moment when people took things into their own hands, scapegoating one group—the Jews—and acting out of jealousy and envy, perpetrating evil.

God’s change is different. God’s change is about going to the mountain of God where the swords are beaten into plowshares and the spears are made into pruning hooks, where people don’t learn to use swords and there is no longer war. God’s change is a different kind of change.

So as we changed the sanctuary this morning, we changed it with decorations. We changed its look. We have to think about what kind of change we’re talking about, because it’s very easy to want to simply change the surface, the superficial. It’s easy to simply think about these decorations as a way to forget what’s real and what needs to happen and the struggles that are with us.

We can look at them in another way, however. We can look at them as pointing us to and helping us remember God and God’s unexpected actions. The Gospel tells us that Jesus’ coming is, and will be, unexpected. God seems to like to come in unexpected ways, at unexpected times, and enter into our lives. It says to stay awake; be ready. So we can use these decorations as a way of reminding us of God’s eternal nature, reminding us of the star blazing in the sky, reminding us of God coming to be among us, reminding us of the incarnate love of God come to be with us. We can be awake to unexpected ways and unexpected times God comes into the life of God’s children.

As we look at Romans, it reminds us to not slip into drunkenness and revelry, debauchery and licentiousness, into quarreling (strife) and jealousy. It reminds us to be honorable. The way to decorate our lives, to prepare for the unexpected, is to live honorably and not slip into the unhelpful and unhealthy, especially in our relationships with each other.

You see, as we look forward to Christ coming, I think there's also a way that we are coming. As we put up the decorations, we are thinking about the coming. We're entering into that coming. We get to come as well. We get to come to the mountain of God. We get to come into the light that is coming to us. It's a reminder to begin to put on Christ, as Paul puts it.

As we put on these decorations, we're invited to put on Christ, to put on the very incarnate love of God. It's an invitation for us to put on the love of Christ as we come again into the light of God coming to us. Amen.