

“Here Today---Gone Tomorrow”

II Peter 3:8-15a

(www.biblegateway.com/bible?passage=ii+peter+3:8-15a)

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“Since everything here today might well be gone tomorrow, do you see how essential it is to live a holy life? Daily expect the Day of God, eager for its arrival.” (II Peter 3:11, The Message)

(www.biblegateway.com/bible?passage=ii+peter+3:11)

Peter’s message is to a church living in a hostile environment undergoing persecution. We have a tendency to read Holy Scripture as if it were written to us as individuals. However, in this case it is very clear, Peter is writing to the church urging the church to live life within the circle of Christ’s light especially since they are under severe persecution.

Peter writes of the coming Day of God. Many of the Apostles identified the Old Testament Day of the Lord with the early Church understanding of the glorious Second Coming of Christ. Peter is paraphrasing Holy Scripture when he talks of the chemical elements of this earth melting under the fire of God’s coming.

The Prophet Joel foretold the Day of the Lord saying:

The Day of the Lord is coming, it is near, a day of darkness and of gloom, a day of clouds and thick darkness. (Joel 2:1-2) (www.biblegateway.com/bible?passage=joel+2:1-2)

The Prophet Isaiah foretold:

Behold the Day of the Lord comes, cruel with wrath and fierce anger, to make the earth a desolation and to destroy its sinners from it. (Isaiah 13:9)

(www.biblegateway.com/bible?passage=isaiah+13:9)

The Prophet Zephaniah foretold:

A day of wrath is that day, a day of distress and anguish, a day of ruin and devastation, a day of darkness and gloom, a day of clouds and thick darkness... (Zephaniah 1:14-15)

(www.biblegateway.com/bible?passage=zephaniah+1:14-15)

On the first Sunday of Advent weekend Alia spoke of the need to acknowledge the fact of Christ’s glorious return to earth. Let us not get caught in the age-old question of when Christ will return. Let us not lose time in the man made theories of pre-millennial, post-millennial, a-millennial, or even the popular movie, 2012 based upon a questionable reading of the Mayan calendar. If you check my Pastor’s Page you will find a link to the Foundation for the Advancement of Mesoamerican Studies which will give you the facts about the Mayan calendar. I remind you again of Jesus’ clear statement that even He does not know the time of His return. **(Mark 13:32)** (www.biblegateway.com/bible?passage=mark+13:32)

In today’s passage Peter reminds us that God understands time quite differently than we do. God just doesn’t count by our Gregorian calendar! One day means something very different for God than for us! Therefore, our theoretical speculation about the Coming Day of the Lord may be interesting, but it is fruitless. A far more important task is to daily live within the circle of Christ’s light, doing Christ’s work, serving Christ’s mission of building up God’s New Community, while we await Christ’s ultimate return to Planet Earth.

There are two key words to help us live within the circle of Christ’s holy life. Watching and confessing are vital actions of Christ’s followers who live in between heaven and earth, between the here and the not yet.

Watching is an Advent practice!

Watching includes anticipation, responsibility, and persistence. Several years ago I received an email message from a friend affirming a lifestyle of Advent watching. He returned home from a summer trip to find himself involved in the middle of a firestorm. He was diagnosed with a rapidly progressing brain tumor. He had been through surgery and radiation. He lost his Clinical Social Work practice because he could not work. His disability insurance company denied his claim. His medical insurance company was questioning payment on major bills. In his email message he shared that the tumor was growing again and the Physicians were now talking about experimental treatment. I want to share with you a few lines of his Advent watching message.

I believe in miracles and furthermore I will continue to do everything in my power to live. I will face as directly as I can the nature of my disease while at the same time refusing to live in its shadow. How interesting that this Advent we are about watching. Watching, yes, for Jesus. But such watching develops within each of us the practice of watchfulness and waiting. I invite you to join me in that practice in the full knowledge that there are amazing things to be learned as we proceed. Watch with me, then, and learn those things that were far beyond our imagining or understanding. Learn those things that move each of us toward liberation. Learn those things with me and live! God bless you as we begin our Advent pilgrimage!

I share with you this email message not only because it points out the power of an Advent watchful life being lived in the circle of Christ's love. I share it because it moves me on to the next point of Advent living:

Confessing is Advent living.

In the beginning of this sermon I mentioned that Peter was writing to the church, not just to individuals. As a church we are called to live within the circle of Christ's light. Very few individuals can live a holy life alone! Most of us cannot stay within Christ's circle of light without the help of others! Our minds so easily turn to the negative when we are by ourselves! And, life is too hard to live by ourselves. We find the power to live victoriously only when we live in the circle of Christ's light with our friends. And, we can only stay within the circle if we are together!

David Bolt writes: "Anyone who has ever tried to formulate a private prayer in silence, and in his own heart, will know what I mean by diabolical interference. The forces of evil are in opposition to the will of God. And the nearer a man approaches God's will, the more apparent and stronger and more formidable this opposition is seen to be. It is only when we are going in more or less the same direction as the devil that we are unconscious of any opposition at all."

Allow me to make the point that all of us need to confess to God in a very practical manner each day using an email that made the rounds several years ago.

- ◆ Funny how a \$20.00 bill looks so big when you take it to church, but so small when you take it to the mall.
- ◆ Funny how big an hour serving God looks and how small 60 minutes are when spent watching television.
- ◆ Funny how we get thrilled when a football game goes into overtime, but we complain when a sermon is longer than the regular time.
- ◆ Funny how laborious it is to read a chapter in the Bible, and how easy it is to read 200-300 pages of a best selling novel.
- ◆ Funny how we believe what newspapers, radio and television commentators, emails, movies and blogs say, but question what the Bible says.
- ◆ Funny how we can be fooled into living within the negative, seeing only the ugly and miss the beauty of God's grace displayed all around us; and
- ◆ Funny how we can fear anything and anyone who is different than us or our expectations while looking to buy something new for a friend this Christmas.

There is a diabolical power in this world that will deceive you every time without the support, help, and comfort of other Christian friends! You cannot defeat evil by yourself! You need the power of a community of Christ's light to enable you to confess your weaknesses, be forgiven, and grow stronger.

And, you cannot make it through the firestorms of life on your own. It is only as we live and work together in the circle of Christ's light that we can find victory on the other side of Planet Earth's firestorms.

- ◆ You received notification yesterday. Your company is going through corporate downsizing. You're 50 and out of a job. You're going through the firestorm.
- ◆ You have a secret battle you wage every day. You struggle with sobriety. Your addiction threatens not only your life but impacts the quality of life of all those around you. You and they are going through the firestorm.

- ◆ Your daughter just gave birth to a child who is experiencing severe renal failure. Her kidneys are not functioning. The outlook is grim. You and your family are going through the firestorm.
- ◆ You visited the doctor. You fear the worst. She breaks the news: breast cancer. You're going through the firestorm.

Every one of us will go through such a firestorm at one point in our lives or another. When the storm crashes down on us the first thing that will come into our minds is the temptation to withdraw, pull away, and not let anyone know. Phrases like: "Handle it yourself!" "Real men don't cry." "Put on a happy face, no matter what you are feeling inside." Don't let anyone know what's really happening in our family." The message from the world (and guess who else?) is to build a wall around yourself and take care of it yourself. In other words, take yourself right out of the circle of Christ's light!

God created every one of us to be integrally involved in a community. God creates each one of you to live most abundantly within God's family. In order to do so, we must in all ways learn to live confessional lives. We need to learn how to confess; "Life is tough right now in our house!" We must acknowledge that all of us are on the spiritual journey. None of us has arrived. All of us are learning. And, we learn best when we are open, vulnerable, and willing to be involved with each other. The Holy Spirit can move among us only when we are willing to drop the masks we wear and be human with each other.

Lest you think I am just speaking psychological mumbo jumbo, let me point out a phrase in the Lord's prayer which we just prayed. Jesus directs us to pray, "***Forgive us our sins, as we have forgiven those who have sinned against us.***" In case that is not enough, Jesus reiterates that point just after he finishes the prayer. He goes on to say, "***For if you forgive others their sins, your heavenly Father will also forgive you, but if you do not forgive others, neither will you Father forgive your sins.***" (Matthew 6:12, 14-15) (www.biblegateway.com/bible?passage=matthew+6:12:14-15)

Jesus teaches us the power of taking down the walls between us. God can work when we are willing to let God move within us and among us. God cannot work if we keep up the walls, hold onto the pain, and look for ways to seek personal revenge. Confessional living is living with a spirit of forgiveness.

- Knowing the time is short.
- Knowing that we live between the now and the not yet.
- Knowing that we can be here today and gone tomorrow.

We are charged to live in a community where forgiveness is practiced through confession and prayer.

Let me close with an example of this kind of confession that comes from a man who was living the here today gone tomorrow lifestyle. Perhaps you remember the book, Tuesdays with Morrie, by Mitch Albom. The book is a series of interviews with a dying friend named Morrie. In one of the later chapters Morrie says, "Mitch, there is no point in keeping vengeance or stubbornness. These things I so regret in my life, pride, vanity. Why do we do the things we do?" Mitch went on to ask if there were any regrets that still lingered. Morrie said yes. He pointed out a sculpture of him as a young man. He talked of the man who had created it. Then he said, "Well, here is the sad part of the story. Norman and his wife moved away to Chicago. A little while later, my wife Charlotte, had to have a pretty serious operation. Norman and his wife never got in touch with us. I know they knew about it. Charlotte and I were very hurt because they never called to see how she was. So we dropped the relationship. Over the years, I met Norman a few times and he always tried to reconcile, but I didn't accept it. I wasn't satisfied with his explanation. I was prideful. I shrugged him off. Mitch...a few years ago...he died of cancer. I feel so sad. I never got to see him. I never got to forgive. It pains me so much...Forgive yourself. Forgive others. Don't wait, Mitch. Not everyone gets the time I'm getting." (Mitch Albom, Tuesdays with Morrie, pp.165-167)

The "holy life" is lived within the circle of Christ's light.

While you are here today, live life in the circle of Christ's light. Holiness is defined as life lived in community within Christ's circle of light. You separate yourself from the darkness of the world and allow the light of Christ to shine within you and through you. Perhaps today you are aware of some dark shadow, some pus pocket of emotional pain, some harsh feelings about someone else, some fear, some past way you failed the Lord and failed yourself. Perhaps you have built up a wall to keep others out so that you cannot be hurt. Perhaps you are angry with someone, or even with God. Jesus invites us to come to the altar, let go of whatever past baggage we are carrying and be prepared for the Spirit of God to shine through us. Let go of your pride. Let go of your will to control everything. Today is the day to begin to live open, vulnerable,

confessional. Today is the day to let go and let Christ shine within you. You are here today. There is no guarantee you will be here tomorrow!

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