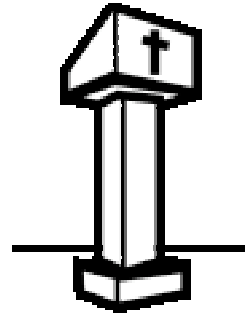


**Sermon Synopsis –
First Sunday of Advent, Year A
Preached by Fr. Peter Champion
November 28, 2010**



Today is November 28, 2010. There has never been another November 28, 2010 before, and there will never be one again. Today is unique. Today is also the First Sunday of Advent. Each year in the church calendar, we begin the new year on the First Sunday in Advent. We've had lots of them in the past and will have countless more in the future.

I think that these two descriptions of today give us a pretty good sense of how we understand and explain time. On the one hand, we see time in a linear fashion. Time is like a straight line, and if you remember your Euclidian geometry, you'll remember that lines have no beginning or end—they go on infinitely in both directions. So too, we tend to see time as an endless progression of days from an unknowable past into an equally unknowable future. Think of the hymn "O God our help in ages past," where we sing "*Time, like an ever flowing stream...*"

On the other hand, we see time as circular. In geometry, remember, a circle has no starting or ending point, though circumnavigating a circle means passing through the same set of points again and again. We begin each new year on January 1st, traverse through an ordered progression of days and months, and end the year on December 31st—only to begin the cycle all over again. We mark certain holidays and holy days, birthdays and anniversaries, but the cycle repeats itself each year. Think of the Joni Mitchell song "Circle Game," where the chorus is "*And the seasons, they go round and round...*"

These two ways of understanding time worked well until Albert Einstein came along. As part of his theory of relativity, Einstein described our universe as four dimensional, with time being the 4th dimension. Carrying this to a logical if disconcerting conclusion, Einstein wrote "*for us physicists believe the separation of time into past, present and future is only an illusion, although a convincing one.*" In other words, in Einstein's universe past, present and future all exist at one and the same time. It seems that understanding time is a more elusive goal than we imagined.

The Biblical worldview distinguishes two primary types of time. Both the linear view and the cyclical view fit into what the Bible describes using the Greek word *chronos*. *Chronos* is what someone described on Wikipedia as a quantitative understanding of time. From this root, we get words like chronology and chronometer.

There is, however, another Greek word which describes time—*kairos*. *Kairos* translates into English as the "opportune time," or a "decisive point in time," or from a faith perspective perhaps "God's time." *Kairos* is a disruption of regular time—an event which requires a response and which may well change the course of events. The Wikipedia contributor calls *kairos* a qualitative understanding of time. *Kairos* time is described in the ending lines in Robert Frost's famous poem "The Road Not Taken." Looking back on a decision once made, the poem ends, "*I took the road less travelled by, and that has made all the difference.*"

All this is helpful, I hope, as we think about the Bible readings for today and the season of Advent. In our annual observance of Advent, we look back in history at the decisive events of Jesus' incarnation—his birth, life, teaching, death for us, and resurrection. And we also look toward the future, anticipating Jesus' second coming to usher in the fullness of God's reign and usher us into eternity. These are *kairos* moments—moments which have changed and will change everything. They do and will call us to respond.

Each of our readings this morning describes that anticipated future in different language. Isaiah describes a time of world unity and peace, as all peoples gather in God's presence in a restored Jerusalem. Paul warns his readers that a big change is in process—*"you know what time it is, how it is now the moment for you to wake from sleep."* Pay attention to what is happening, he's saying, and act accordingly. Finally, Jesus says, *"Keep awake therefore, for you do not know of what day the Lord is coming."* Something big is going to happen; don't miss the opportunity.

However, if all we do during Advent is look back at the past and forward into the future, we run the risk of missing all the ways God is acting in the between time. I'm convinced that our lives are filled with *kairos* moments which we are too busy or self-absorbed or distracted to notice. If we have eyes to see and ears to hear, I believe that God offers us countless "aha" moments which can teach us anew and invite us to change.

Most of these moments don't look spectacular; indeed, they can look pretty mundane. But if we pay attention, we may experience these decisive moments in the presence of loved ones, or while running errands, or talking to friends and neighbors, or while listening to music, or even while sitting and daydreaming. Have you ever noticed how a sunrise over Mt. Diablo can change your whole perspective on life?

40 years ago, I attended a Christmas party put on by the Brown Alumni Program in Los Angeles for alums, current students and prospective students. I walked into the banquet room and suddenly spotted a beautiful, tall young woman with curly hair. Discreetly sidling up to her, I began a conversation which lasted all evening. I was taken enough with her that I looked her up the next fall when she arrived on campus. You probably know the rest of the story—that was Susan, my beloved, to whom I've been married 37 years. I believe that evening was in *kairos* time; I could have ignored Susan and missed the opportunity to find the one I believe God had picked out for me as a life partner.

In this Advent season, my prayer is that we look back and give thanks for the first coming of Jesus and the gift of salvation it has brought us. I also pray that we look forward in hope to Christ's second coming, which will decisively usher in God's reign in all its fullness. But I especially pray that we also live this Advent open to God's continual presence and action in our lives, that we might see, hear and respond.