

Matthew 24:36-44

I love to take naps. I will admit it with no shame. There isn't much that I like more than to get up early in order to get all my work done, and then curl up with a soft blanket and sleep some of the afternoon away. To me, it is one of the greatest luxuries in the world.

But what I do not love, in fact, I think that I could say that I hate....is the whole idea of the 'power nap.' Do you know what I'm talking about? The idea of taking a 20 minute nap to feel refreshed and ready to face the world. I don't know who came up with this idea, but they didn't know that napping was supposed to be something that relaxes you. I've tried this whole power nap thing, and I never fall asleep. I lay there and watch the alarm clock, afraid that as I fall asleep the alarm is going to jolt me from any rest that I might have gotten. So I watch it and count down. 20 minutes...19 minutes...18 minutes...until I finally get down to about 4 and realize that I've just defeated the purpose of the nap. I spend the whole time waiting for the end to come, and since I know exactly when it's going to come to an end, I don't get to enjoy the time before the alarm wakes me from sleep.

Isn't this, in some ways, the way we live our lives? Take the advent and Christmas season for example. We begin this weekend a journey of four weeks, all to help us prepare our hearts for the birth of our savior. We spend so much time getting ready for Christmas...I'll admit it...our tree is up already up, decorated and ready to go. I've had my shopping done for while now, but I'm still thinking of things that need to be done before I'm ready for Christmas. And that day will come, and right when it's over we move on and look to the next thing. In a lot of ways, our lives are spent in the expectation of things to come and not really knowing the fact that a lot has happened along the way. We are getting ready for what is to come, because we know what is to come. I know when the alarm is going to go off...we know that Christmas is only 4 weeks away. All we end up being concerned with is what is happening right now, not the end result.

That is what our text is talking about tonight. We live in a time of Already and Not yet. It's one of those things that we hear, and we know what it means, and yet we have trouble putting it into practice in our lives. We know that Jesus has already come. That is what we are getting ready to celebrate, right. We know that he was born in a manger, died on a cross, and was raised again. These things have ALREADY happened. But we also know, because he tells us, that he is going to come again. We know that he has ALREADY come, but yet we struggle to hear that t he has NOT YET come.

What makes this so hard to hear? In a big part, it's because from even the time we are children, we don't like to hear not yet. Can I have dessert? Not yet. Can I have my Christmas presents? Not yet. Can I drive the car? Not yet. Can I get married? Not yet. Can I have the job of my dreams? Not yet. Can I be cured from this illness? Not yet. Not yet. Not yet. And here in our text we hear it again. Is Jesus here? Not yet.

It's also hard to hear, because we like living in the already. We like having things prepared, we like knowing that when Christmas comes, all the getting ready is done and we can enjoy that brief moment. We like knowing the facts of the already, and we like knowing that we don't have to wait anymore.

It's for these reasons that our texts for today are often uncomfortable ones. Why aren't we hearing the very beginnings of the Christmas story? Why are we at least starting at the beginning of Matthew instead of 90% of the way through it? If we're getting ready for Christmas, why are we talking about the second coming of Christ...in some way, he hasn't come the first time yet, right? And how are we supposed to get ready for the second time if we don't even know when it's going to be!?

These are all questions that I had in my head as I looked at these texts. And I don't think that I have all the answers...wait. That's something I know for sure. I **know** that I don't have all the answers. But by looking at the texts, we can see a direction of where to go.

Jesus tells us in the gospel of Matthew that 'that day and hour,' will be just like any other day. People will be doing their jobs; people will be just going about things as they do every day. But then he goes on to tell us that if we knew the time that he was coming we would watch and, once again, miss the journey. The image of the homeowner knowing when the thief is coming and waiting for them to stop them is a poignant one. We have to be ready for what is to come, even if we don't know what that is. But when we do know when things are going to happen, aren't we just like that homeowner? He knew when the thief was coming, so he waited. The text doesn't say that he had dinner with an eye on the door - it doesn't say that he hired others to sit and watch the house - it says that he stayed awake - doing nothing else - until the thief came. He knew when to expect something, so he stopped living in the mean time.

Because we live in the not yet, we are very different than the homeowner. We cannot suspend everything and simply watch and wait. We haven't been given notification about when things are going to happen. It would, in a lot of ways, be silly of us to just stop living our lives that we have been given to wait and watch for that not yet. Mostly because that's all we know about it...not yet.

So does that mean that we aren't supposed to prepare in any way? Are we just supposed to go about our lives in any way we want? I mean, after all, we'll always have that excuse that we didn't know Jesus was coming soon, right? It's not our fault if we aren't ready because we didn't have any warning! If we had been told more than not yet, surely we would have been ready. Surely the innkeeper would have saved a room. Surely we would have shared a meal with the hungry. Surely we would have reconciled with our family. Surely we would have worshiped more often. Surely this... surely that. Unfortunately for our already minds, the only thing that is sure is not yet.

So how are we to live in the already? How are we to prepare for something that we have no idea when it is going to happen? What are we supposed to do?

This is where the season of Advent is such a good teacher. We need to set time apart - away from the rest of the busy calendar and our crazy lives, to remember to prepare - our homes, our lives, and most importantly, our hearts. To know that this little baby, this savior, came and will come when we are least expecting him. So until that time, we should attempt to be all ready, while expecting the not yet.

Was Jesus born, died and raised? Yep - that's already happened. Will he come again? Of course. Just, not yet. Amen. Come, Lord Jesus.

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