

Now and Not Yet
Preacher: Rev. Karen E. Gale
Date: July 1, 2018

00:00
Now and Not Yet
Matthew 24:36-44

Perhaps you have heard the story of the person who prays earnestly to God saying:
“God, I’ve been a good person today. I haven’t taken your name in vain. I haven’t gotten angry. I haven’t cursed or lost my temper. I’ve been loving and peaceful.

“But I have to get up out of bed in a few minutes and I’m not sure how the rest of the day is going to go.”

It is definitely a case of revised expectations

Which is often the case when we first wake up. There is that moment when you wake from sleep. All things seem possible. You are still bridging the real and sleep worlds. And then reality comes crashing in. And with it, revised expectations.

Our scripture from Matthew talks about Jesus’ second coming, the parousia as it is called. When Jesus died people took him at his word that he was coming right back. They waited, expectantly. And by the time our gospel was written it had been 60 years. Now it’s been 2000 years since and Jesus still hasn’t arrived. Occasionally some religious sects go up on mountaintop convinced of Jesus’ imminent arrival. And there are best selling books designed to scare us about being left behind.

But overall, it is hard to keep up the wakefulness. We get anticipation fatigue. We get tired. We revise our expectations.

When?
When will things get better?
When are you coming Jesus?
When will we be saved from all that is wrong with our world?
When?

We come to church and our worship becomes too much a remembrance of history instead of a retelling of a current, very real possibility. We talk about how Jesus DID come, not how Jesus IS coming.

But this is the essence of our faith. That we live in both the “now” and the “not yet.”

Jesus came once as a baby but Jesus is also coming again and again. To break into the world, to shatter preconceptions and hatred. In that sense doesn’t matter when Jesus is coming. It is always now. Or, to be more precise, always now and not yet.

What we learn is how to live in the now and not yet. How do we live in world that reflects horror and joy? That shows us both devastation and redemption? We believe that we are part of the kingdom of God that is both now and not yet.

What can happen is that we lose sight of the kingdom of God right here, the “now-ness”, is that we lose sight of Emmanuel, God with us, and stop watching and waiting and working for

the breaking in of God's power and might just as it happened 2000 years ago and continues to happen.

Instead, we revise our expectations and expect nothing or very little. The poor will always be with us. War is inevitable. Poverty is intractable. We're just throwing our time and money and energy into a black pit that threatens to suck us down into it as well. So let's say a quick prayer, put our heads down and move on. There is nothing to see here.

Except there is something to see. Something to feel. Something to experience.

A four year old girl screaming for her mother in the wake of family separation at the border. Her screams say to us Wake up! The kingdom of God is here now! Jesus is present in this moment, in this little girl. Here is the face of Jesus in this moment. Not a screaming baby crossing into Egypt ahead of Herod, but a terrified child on our border.

Jesus in this guise challenges us to reset our expectations back to the wonder and awe and hope of God's mighty power breaking into this world despite what we see

Seasons of the Spirit, a UCC resource, has this Affirmation:

We believe in God who for love's sake, comes to us over and over again; a God of mystery and grace who is not persuaded by our impatience, anxiety, or need for certainty, yet guided only by a strong, holy desire for the well-being of all.

We believe in Jesus the Christ who through enduring trust and courage, showed us the way to live in God; with compassionate hearts, willing hands, and an open, searching mind.

And we believe in the Spirit who continues to breathe life into creation; hope for earth's renewal and endless passion for lasting and just peace in our time.

We are the people of God. We live in the midst of life's uncertainties, and do not pretend to know too much. Yet in God's good grace we will continue to yearn for and work toward that coming day where love is fully known and God's glory is everywhere to be seen.

That is the promise of Jesus breaking into our world, the second coming, the now and not yet. The now that Jesus has come into our world announcing the kingdom of God is at hand, and the not yet—the kingdom has not yet arrived. The now of Jesus appearing at the border. The not yet of our compassionate response to immigrants and asylum seekers coming to us for help. Jesus has come to us and Jesus is coming to us now.

As Christians we live in that dual reality, the now and not yet. And asks us to actively prepare for the breaking in of God's holy presence and power, that we have seen before and celebrate, and that is coming even now. By preparing we might be ready when the grace of God bursts into our world. We might see it as it happens. And respond.

If we don't expect God to break in and bring change, then how can we see it coming and participate?

As Christians we practice living the now and not yet, holding those two pulling forces together. Now and not yet. It is actually good practice for life because much of our lives is lived in this middle space, contested space between now and not yet. We care for an aging loved one, someone who is dying, but not yet. His dying is both now and not now, not yet. How do we love fully, live fully in that moment? Even our own lives we are even now dying, because that is the process of living. We are always, every day dying, in the sense of now and not yet.

We await the arrival of a child, the birth of a grandchild, an adopted child, a special needs child, a new baby. Life is changing but not yet. The child is both now and not yet. We live in that liminal space—that in between space.

Any marriage, any relationship, friendship, or reconciliation lives in the now and not yet. What we hope for, what we work for, and the reality of what is. The now and the not yet.

One of my favorite hymns in the New Century Hymnal is Help Us Accept Each Other. It has a great line affirming that in relating to one another we should “love them as we find them or as they may become.” That each of us is in process, we are both now and not yet.

Jonathan Wilson-Hartgrove wrote the book *Strangers At My Door* based on his family’s experiences opening up a hospitality house in Walltown outside Durham, NC, self described white outsiders in an African-American community. Over decades they opened the door time and time again to strangers on their doorstep realizing that indeed it was Jesus in the guise of the poor and dispossessed who was knocking.

He writes, “Doestevsky said, “love is action is a harsh and dreadful thing compared to love in dreams.” you are not hoping for a utopia to suddenly appear in the sweet by-and-by. You are not waiting for Jesus to come whip everybody into shape for once and for all.

“No, you learn that Jesus is risen and is coming again. He’s coming for supper tonight and he’s not alone. Jesus is bringing with him Ms. Lewis and Ray, Quinton and Greg, Gary and Ant, Marie and Steven. He’s standing at your door

“Our story is not finished. Our healing is not complete. Justice has not flowing down like waters nor righteousness like an ever flowing stream. But this future that you hope and pray for--this longing so hot it keeps you up at night--has intruded upon your present. As messy and painful as it is, you know the only solution is love. You keep believing because love keeps knocking.”

The now and not yet of our faith.

As Christians, we believe that the Christ did come, did arrive one cold evening, and lived and showed us the meaning of life lived with hope and passion and justice and belief that someday the kingdom of God would be fully here. Now and not yet. We remember the story of our faith and once again reset our expectations back to hope. Back to participation in the now and not yet of the kingdom of God.

The Jesuit priest and peace activist Daniel Berrigan captures the tension between the inauguration of God's kingdom with the birth of Jesus and its culmination in his future coming in his Advent Credo:

It is not true that creation and the human family are doomed to destruction and loss—

This is true: For God so loved the world that He gave his only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have everlasting life;

It is not true that we must accept inhumanity and discrimination, hunger and poverty, death and destruction—

This is true: I have come that they may have life, and that abundantly.

It is not true that violence and hatred should have the last word, and that war and destruction rule forever—

This is true: Unto us a child is born, unto us a Son is given, and the government shall be upon his shoulder, his name shall be called wonderful counselor, mighty God, the Everlasting, the Prince of peace.

It is not true that we are simply victims of the powers of evil who seek to rule the world—

This is true: To me is given authority in heaven and on earth, and lo I am with you, even until the end of the world.

It is not true that we have to wait for those who are specially gifted, who are the prophets of the Church before we can be peacemakers—

This is true: I will pour out my spirit on all flesh and your sons and daughters shall prophesy, your young men and women shall see visions and your old women and men shall have dreams. It is not true that our hopes for liberation of humankind, of justice, of human dignity of peace are not meant for this earth and for this history—

This is true: The hour comes, and it is now, that the true worshipers shall worship God in spirit and in truth. (Testimony: The Word Made Flesh, by Daniel Berrigan, S.J. Orbis Books, 2004.)

We live in the tension between now and not yet. Between Jesus promised in the second coming. And Jesus who comes to us again and again and again, as the stranger, the sojourner, the hungry, the lost, the lonely, the four year old torn from her parent's arms.

So let us move forward in hope, even hope against hope. Let us see visions of love and peace and justice. Let us affirm with humility, with joy, with faith, with courage: Jesus Christ—the life of the world.

Amen.