

Theme: “It’s Time!”

Introduction

Years ago, Gough Whitlam ran a successful campaign with the slogan, “It’s time”. Naturally he was looking at these words as meaning ‘It’s time to change both the party in power as well as the party elected’. This was one of the most successful political campaigns run federally in Australia.

As we enter the Advent season, at the beginning of the Christian year, we hear the Apostle Paul saying, “Wake up! Do you know what time it is?” This is the underlying theme of the passage from Romans 13. Paul’s Letter to the Romans draws on a two-fold image of people awakening from sleep and then putting on new clothes for the day.

This passage is a ‘wake-up call’ for Advent. It’s a little like the thoughts we have with New Year’s resolutions, but here, at the beginning of the Christian Year, we are reminded about ‘getting our lives in order’ – ‘it’s time!

Background

Paul writes to a waiting church. It had been about four or so decades since Jesus was crucified and had been raised from the dead when Paul wrote this letter. The days after the resurrection must have been exciting with the risen Christ appearing here and there to various ones. But with time, the excitement may well have cooled, as it sometimes does with our own faith experiences of the past. Many within the early church thought that when Jesus had said “I’m coming again for you...” this would happen within a few years. But now the years had past and Jesus had not returned. Paul writes to this early Christian community reminding them that God doesn’t do time the way we do time. “Your salvation is now nearer to you than when you first believed.” However, it doesn’t mean that Jesus’ return is imminent! This has been a stumbling block for many literalist Christians over the years that have attempted to predict when Jesus would come again. God’s time, is just that - ‘God’s time’!

Last Sunday was ‘Christ the King’ Sunday. We heard that Jesus was so unlike any earthly king that this title showed up the ridiculous differences between Jesus and earthly kings. In a sense that huge difference between worldly ways and God’s way follows with today’s reading from Romans.

Time as we expect it to be

During this past week Annette and I have not had our home computer. It badly malfunctioned and ‘died’. Not knowing much about these things I called the ‘Quizmo’, people who come and solve your IT problems. Well it was serious and

we've been without our computer ever since. I'm no computer addict but I'm amazed at how much we've missed it. No 'skyping' the kids in Canada and on Thursday Island. No instant checking of emails, facebook, looking at photos, checking things that we want to do etc. I've actually missed not having access to the home computer. So used am I at having instant communication, instant ways of finding out information etc that I feel a little isolated and unsettled.

We are this instant society, expecting to have answers readily available and information 'on tap'. Time is money, has become the 'catch-cry' of our society and is being ingrained into us. This is re-enforced by all the technology to 'save us time' and to 'keep us connected'.

It is into this immediacy of time as our society sees it that as Christians we come up against the concept of 'God's time'. This is a far more personal and reflective spiritual scenario. We talk about a prayer time, worship time, reflective time, time for God as if we can split off a segment of our life and devote that section to God. Yet we are also mindful that all of time is God's! In many ways we are psychophrenic in the way we divide up time between work, family, church, social activities, pleasure etc.

In Advent we focus upon, prepare for, and explore the significance of a God who not only loves us, but also showed up among us, as Jesus the Christ. In other words, Advent is a time when God disrupted our time and took it over as God's time.

When Jesus Christ was born among us in Bethlehem, we realized that something was afoot that was considerably beyond our concepts of just what can and can't be. We realize that we are not left on our own, not as alone as much as we had been led to believe. God with us, God in our time, is Emmanuel, the promised of God.

So perhaps Advent is a yearly reminder that at any moment your time could become God's time. The time that you thought was your own, to live as you please, is in reality God's. A sobering thought!

Story

Years ago I had been talking with a friend and parishioner about major heart surgery he was about to under-go. He only had a 50/50 chance of survival so was naturally hesitant. We shared together and finished with prayer. He survived the surgery and I visited him in hospital. I said "See George, you did survive – isn't that fantastic!"

George replied, "No Dave, I didn't just survive; I did more than that, it's as if I've been born again. I'm not the same person I have been for the past 50 years. It's like God reached into my life and, through this illness, made me somebody better than ever I was before. I've been given a second chance and I'm going to use this time to be a better individual, for God's sake."

God in Christ made an advent, came into a life, and by just showing up, by intruding into time, transformed time itself. What an amazing thought!

Conclusion

In Romans we are reminded to live a life worthy of Christ, here and now, for we do not know how much time we have and when our time 'will be up'. Hence use our time wisely to bring glory to God!

Dag Hammarskjold, the secretary-general of the United Nations who died tragically in 1961 in a plane crash, wrote in his journal;

“For all that has been – Thanks! To all that will be – Yes.”

Hammarskjold was a modern day mystic because he had the capacity to see God in everyday life and could say “Yes” to the total reality of his life.

As we encounter this Advent season let us keep before us what is ahead of us. We read in Galatians 4:7;

“But when the fullness of time had come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under law, in order to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as children....
So you are no longer a slave, but a child, and if a child then also an heir, through God.”

Prayer

Almighty God, you have given us time to live in your good creation. The days of our lives so easily slip past us without us recognising your presence close to us intruding into our world, your world – our time which in reality is your time.

Come to us afresh in this Advent season as we prepare, yet again, for the birth of Jesus.

Reveal yourself to us. Surprise us and redeem our dull days making our time into your time. May we be ever watchful, ever eager for your advent among us, anticipating your coming to us, standing with us in all our days. Amen.