

Advent, Matthew 24:36-44  
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I was looking at my calendar and trying to make an appointment with someone on the phone when I said something probably better left as a thought, "Why does my calendar say 'no seeds, nuts or corn' on this day?" The woman on the phone paused and then said, "Do you have some kind of test?" Ahhh! Though I've known for years that one of my 50<sup>th</sup> birthday presents would be a colonoscopy, and had scheduled it several months before, I had completely blocked it out of my mind. But that is why I couldn't have seeds, nuts or corn the week before. There is a feeling you get when you are waiting for something you don't want to happen.

And there is something about waiting for something you really hope will happen. On Thanksgiving Day my aunt, who came for the holiday, put in an offer on a cottage in Scotland, which she really hopes she can buy. So we were all eating and drinking, but also wondering. Would they accept her offer? Or would they assume she is a rich American who can pay anything they ask (she can't)? It is hard to wait for something we hope will happen when we can't control the outcome. It makes us anxious.

The people that Jesus was speaking to in today's gospel story are anxious. And the author of Matthew who was writing down the stories was writing at an even more anxious time for the people of Israel. The Roman oppression is worse. The temple has been destroyed. The people have no idea what the future holds. So this is why there is all this talk of end times, of the unknown future.

As you know, passages like this have been used by Christians in really unhealthy ways. People hear Jesus say, "about the day and the hour no one knows" and have decided they need to find out the day and the hour. And cults begin, based on some claim about the day and hour that the world will end, and all the energy of the group is focused on that day, and convincing other people they are right about that date. This is not what Jesus is trying to focus our attention on.

Still others hear Jesus say, "one will be left and one will be taken" and decide that this is about judgement. That there are good people and bad people and that they will take it upon themselves to decide who is good and who is bad. This is not what Jesus is trying to focus our attention on.

Jesus is focused on surprise. No one knows who or when or why; it will be a surprise to everyone. The passage about one being left and one being taken reminds me of the anxiety of watching a natural disaster unfold. One house is taken in a landslide, the other is left. It is not about right or wrong. It is the way things are. We do not know what is going to happen next; how do we live in the meantime?

Jesus uses the story of Noah's ark to illustrate this surprise. It is no accident, not just an aesthetic choice, that we are sitting here under this great wooden ceiling. It is a reminder of Noah's ark, we are sitting in a great upside-down boat and we are all in this together. We are like people in a great boat, and not individual kayaks, as American culture tries to convince us. How we keep our balance, how we behave on this boat affects us, and everyone else. We can work to keep the boat afloat and moving forward, or we can contribute to the rocking and pitching and sinking of the boat. The end will be a surprise. How do we keep the boat steady until then?

The other image that comes to me as I reflect on this passage is all that we know about climate change and what we are doing and not doing about it. Jesus seems overly hopeful about human awareness and response. He says, "if the owner of the house had known at what hour his house would be broken into he would have prevented it." We know what is happening to our earth, and yet the majority of us refuse to act.

What anxiety do you bring here today? Maybe you are waiting for something good to happen. Maybe you are dreading something bad that you know will happen. Maybe you don't know if the future holds something good or bad. Perhaps politics or climate change are making you anxious. Or perhaps it is the climate of your soul that needs attention. How do you keep the boat steady in times of anxiety and crisis?

Where do you want to be when the time comes? Do you want to be in this place, with these people? Keeping the boat steady and moving forward? When the surprise comes will you be ready?