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2 Advent, Year B
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It's not about the End: it's about the beginning

When was the last time you were stopped on the street or in a store and asked for the time? "Excuse me, do you have the time?" I actually can't remember when this has happened to me, but I know it has. I remember growing up there was a phone number you could call that gave you time exact time: we would call and set a new watch to that minute and hour. Fewer people today, as studies are showing, are wearing wristwatches: many of us have cell phone, which we know always displays the correct time. Who needs a watch?

We have a complex and layered relationship with time.

When we mull over a decision or are not sure if a relationship will last, we say: 'time will tell.' 'Time flies when we're having fun' and 'time stands still' when things are not going so well. 'Time heals all wounds.' Does it? At this time of year, I find that I'm keenly aware of the time of day when it gets dark: this past week the sun was setting at 4:09 p.m. – making it dark by 4:30. Winter has come!

The late clergyman Henry Van Dyke wrote that:

"Time is
Too Slow for those who Wait,
Too Swift for those who Fear,
Too Long for those who Grieve,
Too Short for those who Rejoice;
But for those who Love,
Time is not."

All through the readings of this season there is a dominating emphasis on time. When will God act, break through and bring about lasting change? The people of Israel waited for centuries for a Messiah, a savior and Advent 101 is all about preparation for that Messiah. It is about hearing the challenge to the call of Isaiah and become like John the Baptist: 'Prepare the way of the Lord, make straight in the desert a highway for our God.'

Time. God's time in the Bible is *kairos*, and our time is *chronos* -- as in chronology. We know they are different. How?

In the Epistle from 2 Peter: v. 8 But do not ignore this one fact, beloved, that with the Lord one day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like one day. Isaiah 40: All people are grass, their constancy is like the flower of the field. The grass withers, the flower fades, when the breath of the Lord blows upon it; surely the people are grass. The grass withers, the flower fades; but the word of our God will stand forever.

Life is precious. It is a gift. Each moment, each day. We cannot bend time or make it stop, but grow to learn what we are to become and do with what God has given us.

I never grow tired of hearing the verses from Ecclesiastes that Peter Seeger used in his 1960's hit song, 'Turn, Turn, Turn.' They remind us that what we see and experience to be coming to an end is also a moment to turn – that turns into something new.

For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven:

a time to be born, and a time to die;
 a time to plant, and a time to pluck up what is planted;
 a time to kill, and a time to heal;
 a time to break down, and a time to build up;
 a time to weep, and a time to laugh;
 a time to mourn, and a time to dance;
 a time to keep, and a time to throw away;
 a time to keep silence, and a time to speak;
 a time to love, and a time to hate;
 a time for war, and a time for peace.

There were protests and tear gas on the streets of Bethlehem this past week. Rocks were thrown. Police sought to quell the unrest. Isaiah 40 v. 1 Comfort, O comfort my people, says your God. Speak tenderly to Jerusalem. Jerusalem on edge in the news: yet again.

The Advent memo to us on the Second Sunday is clear: prepare and be patient. Patiently wait for the Lord to come like a thief in the night as we hear of fire and the heavens passing away.

You know, and I know, that however festive the run-up to Christmas is, we are probably preparing for the wrong things. We are inclined to rush, when we should slow down. In a world that values more, we know, deep down, that we don't need much to experience joy. The little things matter much more than the big things.

The many apocalyptic readings of we've been reading these past weeks – with images of how the world will end invites us to consider endings and beginnings.

I don't think this cinematic device is used too much anymore, but all of the big Hollywood movies of yesterday – MGM, 20th Century Fox, Paramount Pictures – their films always finished with these two words flashed up on the screen: The End. You knew when the movie was over.

As time marches on in our lives, I have found that the endings are tricky to negotiate.

I spend a good amount of time thinking and praying out what you all are thinking and praying about. So, often, what is on my mind is what you carry in your hearts and around your shoulders. I see your worry about the health of loved ones: a father with cancer, a mother who broke her hip, a child struggling with depression, a global economy that is shifting and making it

harder to survive and prosper than it was just a few decades ago. I see many try to find the sweet spot between being busy and occupied with life.

All of this makes me attune to what God may be saying to us through the turns and travails of our lives.

The end is really not the end. The end is the beginning to fuller awareness of the God who gives life.

The world crucified the son God sent to save the world, and God would not give up trying to draw closer to all that God created. God said no to death. On the third day Christ rose again. Resurrection. New life.

When did you think that your life was over as you knew it – or thought so – and as the days and months passed, that wasn't the case?

In the moments of our greatest pain and doubt, loss, confusion and fear, we are being held by a God who is unseen. We are filled with our next breath so that we can keep on breathing by what we call the Holy Spirit, and if we have been open to the greatest mystery – we can imagine and see and feel the face and touch of this God/man the world knows as Jesus. This holy face of love, peace, forgiveness and compassion. Whose birth in Bethlehem we are preparing for yet again.

Following the well-known verses of Ecclesiastes that were set to music, we hear more: v. 14 I know that whatever God does endures forever; nothing can be added to it, nor anything taken from it. We stand between forever and new in hope.