

Scripture: Isaiah 65:17-25; John 1:47-51

Message: He Will Surprise You

December 2, 2018; Bethel CRC, Brockville, ON

Advent 1

Pastor Jack Van de Hoef

A day is coming! A very special day. The countdown is on. For someone that special day is their wedding day. There are plans and preparations. There is busyness and excitement and anticipation. The day is coming!

For someone else the special day is their birthday. There is wonderful anticipation of a special celebration, perhaps a milestone birthday. Sure, there might be the gifts, but the greater joy is in the special visitors, the family, the friends who will come together to share the day. Only so many more sleeps! The day is coming!

For others it is the last day of classes or the last day of exams. It marks the end of a semester, or the end of years of school. It marks the end of the hard work of study. It marks the beginning of a career where all those classes and lessons can be applied. The day is coming!

For others it's Christmas. Only 20-something shopping days left till Christmas! The day is coming when we can open presents. The day is coming when family from across the country will come home. The day is coming.

What do we live for? What day defines our lives? Do we live in the past? Is our life defined by a day or an event of the past, by regrets, or by memories of a better time? Is our life defined by longing for what was, since it was so much better than what is?

What day defines our lives? Do we live in the future? Is our life defined by what might be? Is our life defined by the hope for a different job, or different home, or different friends? Do we live for something new that will come someday because then things will be different, or better?

What day defines our lives? Do we live in the present? Do we enjoy each day to the fullest? Or do we complain about how miserable things are, bemoaning the difficult lot in life that we have been given?

We could ask those same questions about Christmas. What is Christmas? Is it the past? Is it all about Jesus born as a baby in Bethlehem, with the sentimental scenes of animals, shepherds and magi kneeling before the baby?

What is Christmas? Is it the present? Is it all about gifts and family and songs? Is it

about decorations and food? Is it about the spirit of kindness and giving to each other and others?

What is Christmas? Is it the future? Is it all about Jesus coming again to make all things right? Try to find a Christmas card with the theme of Jesus' second coming.

A day is coming. Advent is a season of waiting and anticipation. It's not really a season of countdown, although many people see Advent as a time to count down the weeks until the big day, Christmas. Advent is a season of preparation. It is a season of preparing our hearts to meet the coming Christ. It is a season of examining our lives to see how we are living out our hope and trust and courage. It is a season of waiting and anticipation of the coming of Jesus. That coming might surprise you.

Nathaniel was surprised by how much Jesus knew about him. "You ain't seen nothin' yet, young man!" says Jesus. "Just wait for what's to come. It will be amazing and glorious. It will be a meeting of heaven and earth like you've never seen before."

It's the picture from Isaiah speaking of no more weeping or crying. It's the picture of life for young and old, of homes and contentment and blessings. It's a picture of people and animals getting along and creation restored. It's a meeting of heaven and earth, the way it was meant to be.

A day is coming. "See, I will create a new heavens and a new earth. The former things will not be remembered, nor will they come to mind."

Advent celebrates the coming of Christ. It's the fullness of the meaning of a first coming in a manger. When Jesus came, he proclaimed that the kingdom of God was at hand. He came to bring the present and active rule of God to be evident in the world. He healed the sick and gave sight to the blind. He proclaimed words of hope and comfort. When he ascended, he gave that task to his followers: Go and make disciples of all nations. Go and spread this kingdom rule.

This is the meaning of Christ's coming, to restore the broken relationship between God and a fallen and sinful creation. Jesus came to be like us and to die for our sins. Jesus rose again to defeat sin and death.

This is the meaning of Christ's coming, to make all things new. In Christ *you* are a new creation.

This is the meaning of Christ's coming, to make the world new, to reconcile the world to

himself.

You've heard me say before that we live in the time of the already and not yet. Christ has already come, but he has not yet come again. Christ has already brought the kingdom of God, but it is not yet perfect and complete. Christ has already brought victory over sin and death, but it is not yet perfectly realized.

And so in this Advent season, we celebrate the coming of Christ, who came to bring victory and who will come again to make all things right, forever. We see the manger and the trumpet (symbols in the front of the sanctuary) reminding us that he has come and he will come again. A day is coming!

So what difference does the second coming of Jesus mean? It means that we can live in the present, to the fullest, with great risk, because we know that Jesus is the victorious one.

Knowing that Jesus will come again means that we can have courage to do the right thing already now, and we are not limited by the restrictions or power of sin.

A day is coming. Already now we can live with Jesus setting the agenda, being victorious and hopeful of being involved in great things. We can have courage to say 'No' to the devil who will give a defeatist and pessimistic attitude.

We can live in hope and let our imaginations fly, and not be limited to the restrictions of tradition or judgment.

A day is coming. Already now we can live a life of being restored to God. We can claim forgiveness and let go of guilt and 'should've's' or 'could've's'.

Already now we can restore others, confessing our sins, forgiving and being forgiven.

A day is coming. Already now we can bring hope and comfort and joy into the lives of others as we listen and care for them.

A day is coming. Already now we can restore the world, caring for creation in our decisions and purchases.

A day is coming. Already now we can have a taste of eternity, of fellowship with God and with each other. A day is coming!

Consider this when you come forward to take communion this morning. As you hear the elder say, "The body of Christ, the blood of Christ given for you," consider the past, the first coming of Jesus to be our Saviour from sin. Coming to be born in a manger, human like us. Coming to die on a cross to defeat sin, to declare forgiveness and a restored relationship

with the Father. Coming to rise from the dead in victory.

As you hold the bread and dip it into the cup, consider the present, the living, ascended Jesus who is with us right now, here in the power of the Holy Spirit. His presence is as real as bread and juice. He is at work in our lives and in our world.

His work does not depend on the right person getting elected to parliament. His work does not depend on the government making the right decisions or enacting the right laws. His work is being done through us as his people in whom he dwells with his Spirit. As you hold the bread and dip it into the cup, consider the present work of Jesus in your life.

As you put those elements of communion in your mouth, consider the promise of Jesus to be with us always. Consider that certain hope that Jesus will come again to take us to himself. Consider the promise to celebrate with him in the glory of heaven, beyond the limits of these earthly elements. Consider the trumpet blast at his return in victory and glory.

As you commune with Jesus this morning, as you continue the Advent journey, may God surprise you with his presence, may he surprise you with his promises, may he surprise you with the evidence of his work in this world. May he surprise you with the confident hope that he is working through you and others, till he comes again.

This Advent, reflect and examine yourself to see how you are part of God's work of restoring this creation. The day is coming. May our lives increase in anticipation as we live the fullness of the meaning of that day.

Amen.