

**Rector, Saint James Episcopal Church
At Saint James Episcopal Church
On Sunday, December 1, 2013
The First Sunday of Advent**

"But about that day and hour no one knows, neither the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. Therefore you also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an unexpected hour."

When I was in Jr. High, I think it was 1968, some friends and I snuck into a local club in Madison, Wisconsin called Snoopy's. A new group was playing there that night. They were called The Chicago Transit Authority. Yes, that Chicago. They had a song entitled, "Does anybody really know what time it is?".

Does anybody really know what time it is? In our Epistle reading today, Paul says, "(we) know what time it is." Do we?

Every year it seems to start a little earlier. Shopping, wrapping, shipping, delivering. There are Christmas cards to be sent. There's a tree to be bought and decorated. There's outside decorating to be done - lights to be hung. There are cookies to be baked and fruit cake, oh how I love fruit cake. There is a dinner party or two and a caroling party in a couple of weeks. There's the school holiday program and the office Christmas party. There are people to pick up at the airport. There's the big game, or two. And then there's all the church services (which I know are of the utmost importance to you).

It's all there in our day-timers and iPhones, and it's all OURS. Our time.

And then there's God's time, all contained within the circle of an Advent wreath, a wreath whose first candle is lit this morning. It's the beginning of Advent, the beginning of the church year, a big circle of time that every year turns us from the waiting of Advent to the joy of Christmas, to the sober reflection of Lent to the joy of Easter, to the prayerful patience of Eastertide to the joy of Pentecost, and back again.

I love songs sung by The Highway Men (Willie Nelson, Johnny Cash, Waylan Jennings and Kris Kristofferson). Perhaps their best is called The Highway Man. It is about how life, essentially comes around, and around, and around...

And so the Season of Advent comes around again. But Advent is not a time when we go through the motions of remembering a story whose ending we already know. Advent is about Jesus coming once and promising to come again. It is about the light shining in the darkness and the darkness not understanding it. It is about the Kingdom of God having arrived and yet still arriving.

There is much work left to be done - and not just what we face in the days ahead. Believe it or not, Christmas will arrive whether we get it all done or not.

Will the Kingdom of God come in a similar way? What will you and I have done to bring about its coming? Will we recognize it when it comes? Or, will we go about our tasks, filling our time, and forget about what needs to be done in God's time?

A friend and former priest in our Diocese, Mary Frances Schjonberg suggests that we can overlay the two - these related spheres of time, taking good care of the tasks that will make for a special holiday season and staying awake for the signs of the Kingdom, and its arrival - God's time - breaking into our own.

AMEN.