

## Advent I A 20016

The Son of Man is coming at an unexpected hour!

All sorts of factors, of course, lead us to think we know what Jesus means when we hear him say that he will come at an unexpected hour.

We think we know what that means; we have seen pictures of the last judgment.

People have left tracts in our mailboxes with dramatic renderings;

Maybe we've seen a film or read some book about "the rapture," as some call it.

Indeed, the Scriptures in various places describe his return in what feels like Technicolor reality.

We think we know what he means, but the statement itself would suggest caution about any knowledge we think we have.

He says know no one among us knows the day or the hour; it is not on any schedule we will discern.

It is likely that our conceptions of time, of past, present, and future,

Of a linear series of events,

Of something we have naively called progress,

Likely that all of our conceptual framework for thinking about time is not helpful for thinking about the way that Jesus will re-enter time.

All the tools that we would use to expect him, calendars, experience, algorithms, and forecasting,

we would find, will not work.

He comes at an unexpected hour, and perhaps in an unexpected way.

Not perhaps; certainly he comes in an unexpected way.

The manner of his first appearance among us was only faintly foretold by the Scriptures;

It was so unexpected that most of the Hebrew people could not accept that the birth of a child who grew to a man who died and was raised could be the means of God's redemption.

We must imagine that we cannot imagine either the when or how of his next appearing.

In Jerusalem? Or Mumbai or Beijing or Sao Paulo?

In Hebrew male flesh? Or some other variation of human identity?

Via the web? Will it even be on the Earth?

Or maybe it will be at the chair of St. Peter in Rome, with his friend at his right hand and Paul at his left.

The Son of Man is coming at an unexpected hour; and necessarily in unexpected fashion.

Let us always remember how faulty he promised our expectations would be;

how faulty the expectations of our ancestors were proven to be in his first coming.

Advent every year raises this: I live with a concern that most Christian people I work with in ministry don't think he's coming.

It doesn't come up in vestry meetings; when we wonder if its time to replace the organ,

When we consider whether to hire a new staff member,

No one ever says, well, we should or we should not,

because the kingdom for which we pray daily might come before the loan is due or before the program year ends.

From the silence, I infer that most of us feel that his first coming was a long time ago and that we don't know what to make of these passages, often read in Advent, that call us to prepare for his coming.

For many then, the unexpected hour is not unexpected in the sense of unknown but unexpected in that the sense of expectation has worn off for us.

We expect Christmas to come; Inauguration Day to arrive; our utilities bills to rise.

We expect to get sick and die and perhaps to go to heaven.

Do we expect God to renew the work of Christ in the creation?

I do not know what we, "we" in a wide sense, now expect about that.

The degree to which the hour of his coming is unexpected grows as the church lessens its feelings of expectation.

Sometimes the church itself has dampened its sense of unexpected expectation.

You know when Church is going to be; every Sunday, even Christmas Day and New Years' Day.

8:30 and 10:30 and 10:00 on Wednesday.

You expect I'll be there; I expect you will as well.

I expect that the Holy Spirit will surround us; that God will hear our prayers.

I expected the God will nourish us in the Word that is read and the Gospel preached.

We expect that Jesus will be present to us and will feed us in the spiritual food and drink of the altar.

Sometimes all of God's gracious willingness to meet us here is taken for granted;

We know the day and hour of worship, of divine presence.

It will happen again next week if we don't come, if we come in distraction, if we have not spiritual practices during the week that bring us to Sunday with heightened expectation.

Perhaps having our expectations so readily and regularly met is not completely spiritually good for us.

Should we think of ways to leave each other less satisfied and more expectant in the life of the church?

So Christian faith and following Jesus invite expectation, invite perhaps the vague expectation that we will find Jesus at unexpected hours.

I think of people I've known, who seemed edgy and angry for years, who became loving and forgiving at some point.

Was that one of the unexpected hours, when Christ came?

I think of the poor people who come to the church, who I assume will ask me for money, who instead want to pray, or give a gift, or take spiritual counsel.

Are those unexpected hours, when Christ comes?

I think of my worries, usually in September, that we may struggle to make the church's finances work, and the wonder of January, when we find, most of the time, that God has provided.

Is that that unexpected month of Christ's coming?

It is a great measure of the good news of Jesus that he comes in unexpected ways, at unexpected times.

If he only met our expectations, what a small savior he would be.

If he were limited by our imaginations, how mundane would be our salvation.

But he comes instead, beyond imagination and beyond expectation and greater than both.

We cannot be fully ready for such a Savior, but when a new wind blows,

or there is a knock at the door,

or we see new alignments of people and spirit,

it might be time, time to ask,

Is this the unexpected one at work?

Is this the unexpected hour?