

Jesus warned those who would listen to him to stay awake,
for they didn't know the day or hour of his return,
as the slaves did not know when the master would return.

They were, and we certainly are, ignorant of the time in this way.
Indeed, we are so ignorant of it that many discount or dismiss the possibility we will
ever see Jesus here again.

The Lord will not come, many say, and many more act as though he never will.

Great is our unknowing about the Lord's return.

And Jesus seems to say, on one level, that that is okay;

that though we must be awake and at the ready,

we need not know the day and hour,

for we are not God and such things are in the hands and purview of God.

The intense discipleship to which we are called does not require that we have all
knowledge.

Yet Jesus also says we can learn something from the fig tree,

which his disciples could look at to know that summer was coming,

as the sap rose and the buds came up as harbingers of warmer weather.

Christian people, who must confess in humility how many things they are ignorant of,
are not without some powers of discernment in the Spirit.

We have some idea what time it is.

But it is a challenge in a disorienting season.

There is a fig tree in my yard, and its leaves have just loosened and fallen.

My sweetgum lost her leaves a while ago,

but the willow and water oaks are just beginning their massive shed.

I forsake the seven iron for the rake on my days off in December,

for we have many leaves in our yard,

and they fall later here than anywhere I've ever lived, right up to Christmas.

Advertisers wanted me to have a fall feeling when in September,

when it was still in the 90s here.

Pumpkin spice, mums, and Indian corn.

Now that it is finally cool, now that the fall has actually arrived,

all the urging is toward a winter wonderland.

Snowmen and icicles and sleighs are all around,

which might make sense in January and February,

when our brief winter finally arrives.

So we are confused about what time it is;

our seasons are strangely disconnected from our weather and actual experience.

If you've you noticed that, you may be paying more attention than most.

Is this disconnection a sign of the struggle of the human spirit these days?

Do we take our bearings too much from advertising or distant centers of power, so much so that the evidence of who we are and what we are experiencing fades away?

We need to know who we are, whose we are, where we are, to be Jesus' people as we are meant to be.

We need feet on the ground, eyes open, and maybe a moistened finger in the air to check the wind.

There is more to learn there than from the digital promptings that are constantly infecting our psyches.

Jesus said, you know how to read the fig tree.

We know how to read the seasons, if we will take the time and sharpen the ancient skills.

Those ancient skills are, as they have long been, prayer, worship, and dwelling in the scriptures.

These will acclimate you, tell you the season, root you, a good better than the manipulated world of facebook or cable television.

Of course, it doesn't matter if you drink pumpkin spice lattes when it is 90 degrees or inflate your snowman when it is 60 degrees, in the middle of a pile of leaves.

It is weird but not life-threatening.

It is much more dangerous if you can't sense the season at a deeper level, if you don't know what to do these days with the precious life, power, energy and time God had given you.

What a shame it is to waste a season or a whole life by not seeing what God wills and of what you are capable of doing, for Christ's sake.

I'm halfway through raising my older son,

and we are beginning to speak of being a man and the terrible examples of manhood gone wrong in our world.

I better use the limited time I have left with him.

I'm halfway through my years of work in the church, and it is time to make sure I am making the main thing, the main thing.

What season is it for you? How is Christ calling? Do you know?

So that's judgment, about which we hear in these lessons and will hear, in the weeks of Advent to come.

Judgment got a bad rap a while ago but is really good news.

Judgment is deciding what matters,

what reflects God's glory,

what is holy and living,

and dividing that from that which destroys people, the creation, and which excludes the glory and love of God.

To say that we need a capacity to sort out the seasons, of our lives and the world,

is to say we need to be able of a self-judgment that comes with spiritual maturity.
And if we will judge ourselves,
we are so much more likely to find ourselves on the lively side of the return of the
Lord, which every soul yearns for.