

“Now Is the Moment”

My wife, Kelly, and I brought our winter coats, our hats and gloves for the very moment we sat on top of Cadillac Mountain, which is found in Acadia National Park in the state of Maine. The mountain is the highest point on the North Atlantic Seacoast. It was still dark, about 4:30 in the morning, and even though it was just mid-September the air temperature was in the 30s. We and about 300 other sleep-deprived souls ventured to the mountaintop to witness the rising of the sun. We were glad we'd brought along a blanket to lay on the bare rock as we took up our position to witness the beginning of a new day. Thankfully, the sky was clear except for some low lying clouds at the horizon, which enhanced the orange, yellow and pink colors that slowly painted across the place where the ocean and sky mingle together. For the next 45 minutes or so we watched and it was beautiful and remarkably quiet, even with all the others there. They must have sensed, as we did, that we were watching something no one had ever seen before, the rising of the sun in that exact moment of time, in that place, at the beginning of a new, unique and God-created day. I'm glad for the memory of the experience because in the rush of this world it is good to have those moments when we are focused on both the wonder of life and on what God can do. When those two things come together, the wonder of life and what God can do, the result is remarkable.

We are not huddled together on a cold mountain this morning but we do gather at the edge of a beautiful and God-centered season we in the church call Advent. This is the time when we wait and watch for the coming of Christ. We've read from the Apostle Paul's letter this morning and he describes the new thing God is doing, like the rising of the morning sun. "You know what time it is," he writes, "how it is now the moment to wake from sleep...the night is far gone, the day is near." (Romans 13: 11-12) Paul is not talking about the physical rising of the sun. It's not the dawning of the actual morning's light Paul is describing but the light that shines because of Christ. Note, with me, the beautiful way Paul points to what our faith makes possible. In the way night fades and day begins, God wants us to move from the darkness of a God-forsaken life into the light of a love that creates a whole new way of being. Why would we move so quickly to connect the dawning light Paul writes about with love? Because he does. Immediately before the words we've read today, Paul writes that "love is the fulfilling of the law." In other words, everything God hopes for in us and everything God requires of us is wrapped up in receiving and offering love. If anything else becomes our priority, we've missed the mark. If we place our energy toward that which blocks or cancels love, we are still in the dark. Now is the time, writes Paul, and Advent is the season for us to be ready and to watch for what God can do.

Time. There is no season quite like this one when it comes to being aware of the time. Time is a precious resource for us. First of all, we never seem to have enough of it. We say things like, we "don't want to waste time" and yet we all know what it feels like to run out of time or lose time or struggle to find the time. There is a clergy leadership blog I read regularly and the author often writes about how those of us who work in Christian professions must maximize the use of our time. His theme is that time management is essential for effectiveness and efficiency. This applies to all of us. If we don't manage our time then the time will manage us. So, what do you do to keep track of the time? Do you make lists? Do you set notifications or alarms on your electronic devices? Do you have a marker board on the wall or by the door with reminders? Do you tell someone close to you to be sure to tell you what you are not to forget? What helps you to manage the time? The danger, I've discovered, is that worrying about whether or not we are managing time effectively can actually increase our stress over how we are managing our time. In our effort to keep track of the time a cycle of anxiousness can spin around us and before we know it the time has slipped away. There is a sense of futility about it all. What is an over busy, over committed, over anxious people to do? There's no easy answer, of course, but the bible encourages us to slow it down and to focus on what God is doing right now. "This is the moment," writes Paul. How we approach this moment in time and the ways in which we expect God to be active and present in this moment makes all the difference.

Amy-Jill Levine is the author of our congregation's Advent study called, Light of the World. The opening section of the book reminded me of a helpful concept of time, and the first Sunday of Advent is the right moment to give this some thought. In the world of the ancient Greeks there were various ways of thinking about time. One way is connected to the Greek word, "chronos." This is the way we usually think about time, chronologically; one moment following the other, never repeating but steadily clicking forward. That's chronos. But, the Greeks had another way of thinking about time and they called it, "kairos." Kairos is God-time. Instead of always moving forward, kairos time moves deeper. Instead of clicking in a steady pattern with no possibility of repeating, kairos time can bend forward or fold backward because a kairos moment is filled with God's presence and moments like that transcend the limitations of time and space. When Paul writes that now is the time the word he uses is kairos. Now is the time, now is the moment to experience the fullness of God.

I want to come back to the focus of love as we wrap up the message today. As we move through this time before Christmas, we know there's a great deal to do. Given that, let's add a new priority at the top of our lists. Before we do anything else, let's prepare to receive and offer love. As we are participating in and reacting to all of the commotion of the season let's check ourselves. Are we receiving and offering love? This priority isn't just for the time when we come to worship. When we're outside the church, when we form our opinions and make our judgements about others, are we first receiving and offering love? Now is the time and this is the moment when the fullness of God's love is waiting for our response. It's like watching a sunrise from a mountain look-over except it's different. When we are deep in God we're not just watching the light, we are in the light, and we are full of light. When the love of God rises up within us a whole new day begins.

I know there are some who dread the start of the Christmas season. I think it depends on what we are looking for and what we are waiting for, and what we expect God will do with the next moment in our lives. We're not dreading what's coming. We can hardly wait. We will watch and look and be ready for the next moment when Christ comes and makes us a partner in God's love.