

When my oldest daughter was expecting her first child, she was prepared to cope with many problems. Feeling sick in the morning, a bulging belly, the discomfort of not knowing how to sit, walk or sleep comfortably. But if we expect something great, we are prepared to put up with many problems. We even gladly bear them. Look at our kids, when their birthday, or santa, is near... The expectations of harvesting a host of presents makes them excited. Hope for what is about to come, is a powerful motivator in our life.

Advent has begun, and we anticipate the coming of Jesus Christ. Not only do we re-enact and re-live the expectation of the people of God 2000 years ago for the first coming of God to this world as a baby. We also await his fantastic return to this world of ours to renew all things - including our lives.

Light is coming

Paul, in his letter to the Romans, says that "the night is far gone, the day is near." In the Gospel reading of this morning, we see how Jesus prepares his followers for his return. That is what Paul alludes to, the return of our Lord himself. We expect his rule; we expect him to bring peace. That has been the hope of God's people all along. One day:

He shall judge between the nations and arbitrate for many peoples and they shall beat their swords into plow shares and their spears into pruning hooks; nations shall not lift up sword against nation neither shall they learn war any more.



That is, in very earthly, human terms, what we hope for. That God brings us peace. Jesus will not just bring us peace; he *is* our peace. His presence creates perfect peace when He comes. It is the beauty of the presence of God himself that will make all the difference.

Should we blame non-Christians for not waiting for our Lord? No of course - why would they. If you do not know God - Father Son and Holy Spirit in his beauty, why eagerly wait for him? Jesus is warning his followers. Us. He warns those who should know better. In a few words our Lord Jesus Christ sketches the insensitivity and carelessness of his own followers towards the things of God.



It is so easy to find it more important what we eat and drink, and how we dress. We care more for finding the right husband or wife. We worry about the things we see before our eyes. But doing so, we can easily overlook the things that truly matter and that are much more important. Our eternal fate is so much more important than this temporary life.

I believe we all have a tendency to forget that our Lord is one day coming back to make this world a perfect place; and Jesus, being the good shepherd that he is, warned his closest friends, his disciples. Do not forget. Be awake. Stay on the alert. He knows we tend to focus on the one meter of the road ahead of us, more than on the light at the end.

Living in the light of the future

If you walk on a dark road, it is tempting to look down, fearing every stone and pothole. But actually, by looking forward, by looking into the distance, we walk better and we do not lose track. Look at the light that is coming - and as we do that, we experience light at the place where we are. The source of light may still be far off - but the rays of the sun at dawn already reaches us.

We know, Jesus is coming one day - but he is already in our midst. He is Immanuel, God with us. The future is already breaking into our present life. Our Lord is here; He is here to care for us, to bless us, to guide us.

Because we know he will bring peace, we are able to experience his peace today to a certain extent. The Prince of Peace is already in our midst. And as He is in our midst today, all that he will bring us one day, is in a sense already with us. We expect him to rule this earth; but today he already rules in the lives of those who are able to see his coming in the distance.



Isaiah describes that the perfect Kingdom will be coming; from Jerusalem the Word of the Lord shall go out; the nations shall one day lay down their arms and serve the Lord. And with that future in mind, Isaiah says, "O house of Jacob, come let us walk in the light of the LORD!"

I believe the writers of the New Testament tried to show how this future is in a sense already with us. Jesus and his apostles preached the Word of the Lord in the Temple, and the nations joined - from everywhere people came to follow our Lord and to walk in His light. The apostle Paul fol-

lows the same line of arguing. Because the night is far gone and the day is near, we must today lay aside the works related to darkness and we must already live by the light that is coming; He says, "put on the Lord Jesus Christ", as if He is a coat, and put off all things that are not in accordance with his will.

Because of what we expect him to do perfectly well and throughout the universe one day, we today anticipate all this by doing today what He will one day accomplish. We listen to his Word; we are people of peace; peacemakers. That is the central aspect of his coming; that should be the central aspect of our life today.

This world will one day be at peace with God and with itself. So today we will live in peace with God and with all people, and we are active peacemakers in our families, among our friends, in church, in our jobs, in school, in this world. Peacemaking does include that we speak of the Gospel. The most basic peace is the restoration of man's relationship with God. Only that helps us to be truly at peace with ourselves and with others.



Peacemaking is not a lifestyle for softies. It is a lifestyle of heroes. Of people who are prepared to lay down their own lives for the sake of the wellbeing of others. If we want to be a bridge between people and God, and a bridge between people, we will be hurting. Bridges are trampled upon. But it is worth it - as it is in line with the future of God.

Stay awake

But it is so easy to become too relaxed. Maybe because it is less painful. It may temporarily feel attractive to forget about God and his coming Kingdom, as we can then also forget about the claims, the laws, the Word of God, the expectations of the King. We must stay on the alert; Jesus explains to his disciples that this moment of his return will come totally unexpected. Both for those who believe in him and for those who do not believe in him, his coming will be so unexpected. We do not know when this will happen. Yes, we see the dawn, but this is a vision we share with the church of all ages. With all believers, we see the light at the horizon.

Conclusion

Your ordinary daily work, or study, it matters to him. He wants you to take care of your children, to repair your house. To build guitars, to teach music, to head the primary department in school. To be a good lawyer, to do the accounts well, to clean your house. That is the arena of your service to God. And in this arena, I believe, he asks us, above all, to show our commitment to God and our fellow human being, by being evangelists and peacemakers.

As we see the light of our Lord God on the horizon, he already enlightens us. But we only see this, we are only enlightened, if we have our eyes wide open. So stay awake. And wonder, how in the light of all that what is to come, how you will spread the light of God in your normal environment this week. Commit yourself again, to be a servant of the Gospel of peace.

Amen