

**Living in Expectation, by Daniel H. Kuhn, Jr. A1071202**  
**Romans 13:11-14 and Matthew 24:36-44**  
**Elon Community Church, United Church of Christ, 2 December, 2007**

A number of years ago, our daughter came to me and asked to borrow an alarm clock, either that, or could I set her alarm clock. “How come you can’t set it?” I asked.

“The numbers aren’t right,” she said.

“What do you mean the numbers aren’t right?” She had piqued my curiosity. I went in and looked. Lo and behold, each light emitting diode was missing the left portion of its digit. Instead of an eight, the number looked like three. It was impossible to read the time at all. Was it 2:00 or was it 12:00? Was it 1:00 or was it 7:00, or was it 11:00?

When we only get part of the information, we can really be confused.

As the household repair person, I pulled the alarm clock apart and wiggled some contacts on the LED, and lo and behold, I could read each entire digit. I had fixed the clock! Now, my daughter could tell what time it was. She could go to sleep expecting the alarm clock to wake her up each morning at the right time.

Expectation is important. When you look at a clock, you expect to be able to know what time it is! Anyone who has been pregnant can tell you about expectation. Ask our young parents and parents to be. We redecorate rooms. We buy strollers, safe car seats, playpens, cribs, diapers.

We prepare ourselves psychologically. God in infinite wisdom designed nine months for a normal pregnancy so we have better chance of being mentally and emotionally prepared. By the time nine months of expectation are ended, parents are ready and waiting for the baby to be born. The expectant mother is especially ready, because of carrying around this child for what seems like an eternity!

At this time of year, we expect Christmas to come, and so we make preparations. We do a lot of preparations when we’re expecting visitors, don’t we? We vacuum rugs, clean walls, knock down spider webs, make beds, and clean bathrooms because we want place to look nice for guests.

A large part of what makes Christmas special is all of the expectation and preparation. Look into the eyes of a child as she sees a Santa Claus— that is expectation. The expectation causes us to write lists, prepare gifts, plan parties, coordinate schedules, decorate trees, and send greetings. These activities of preparation themselves lend to the spirit of Christmas. That spirit even causes us to drop money in Salvation Army kettles, to bake cookies, to prepare Christmas baskets, and purchase Christmas cheer presents. Our preparations, our activities of expectation actually help make Christmas happen.

I’m going to ask something personal. Are you expecting Jesus to come? I am not referring just to the birth of a baby at Christmas, but to the God of history coming in human form to usher in God’s realm here on earth? It is there in our Bible. It is there at core of our Christian faith, and it makes us uncomfortable to think about it. The end of the world will come one day. We assume that our lives will just continue on the way they always have, but the Day of the Lord is coming.

The Day of the Lord involves judgment. Jesus’ coming is compared to the flood in the days of Noah. People will be judged on the basis of their behavior, like Noah was judged to be God-fearing and he and his family were saved while the rest of humanity drowned.<sup>1</sup> Jesus himself said

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<sup>1</sup>Matthew 24:37-41

that the Son of Man will judge all people according to how they treated others.<sup>2</sup>

Perhaps we have neglected that concept of judgment to detriment of society. I heard on radio once the results of a study done about business economics in countries in which people have a strong belief in hell. They had more successful commerce than countries in which people did not have a strong belief in hell because of ethics: people were more honest because of a fear of final judgement and punishment. That led to more successful business because security and policing were not needed as much.

Personally, I have problems with behavior based on reward and punishment. I believe that as Christians, we should be following Jesus' ways and teachings and behave ethically simply because that is what Jesus would do, and not because we simply want to "get into heaven" or avoid hell.

Jesus will come again. No one knows when. We may not even recognize him, but we are called to live in expectation: expectation of God's kingdom; expectation of God's reign of love and justice; expectation of God's peace; expectation of a day of beating swords into plowshares and spears into pruning hooks; expectation of a day when nation shall not lift up sword against nation and people will not study or learn war any more.

Just as our expectation of Christmas leads us to prepare for it, so our expectation of the coming of Christ at the end of history will lead us to prepare. If we expect Christ's coming, we will begin now to beat the swords into plowshares. This is part of God's realm. Jesus also said, "blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God."<sup>3</sup>

Today marks beginning of the season of Advent. It is a season of contrast. Live in the contrast between what is and what is to be. Live in the contrast between what is and what God will bring about.

We live in the contrast between sacred and secular. The world outside scurries in frantic preparation for the busy Christmas season. The atmosphere within the church is one of reflective expectation. We deliberately slow down our pace in order to prepare our hearts to receive Jesus into our midst.

We are to live in expectation, but to be prepared for the unexpected. Keep awake, for you do not know on what day your Christ is coming.<sup>4</sup> We see part of the numerals and we can only guess at what time it is. The broken families, the broken peace, the troops off in Iraq and Afghanistan, and the floods, hurricanes, and earthquakes lead many to guess that the end of the world is near. However, we do not know and we will not know.<sup>5</sup>

Just as my daughter and I could read the numerals on her clock after I wiggled the contacts, when we wiggle our prayer contacts and get the full connection with God, we discover we can read the time accurately. This is God's time and we are in God's hand.

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<sup>2</sup>Matthew 25:34-40

<sup>3</sup>Matthew 5:9

<sup>4</sup>Matthew 24:42

<sup>5</sup>Matthew 24:36