

Pastor T.C. Arnold  
3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday in Advent  
Matthew 11:2-6  
December 15<sup>th</sup>, 2013

Will the future ever be now? Will we ever be able to speak of the future in the present tense? It is winter and I realize that not many people are in the mood to talk about baseball, but as one who grew up much closer to the other side of the state, I'm a person, perhaps, who is more inclined to do so. I grew up in a family of St. Louis Cardinals fans. We all love the Cardinals, except for my sister's family – who are all Cubs fans. We are not sure how this has happened. But we still manage to love each other.

I mention this to illustrate future hope and present reality. You see, for the Cardinals baseball fan, the future is now. The hope of winning is a present reality. The Cardinals have been to the World Series two of the last three years – and that is the ultimate goal. But when we ask my sister's family what happened to the Cubs, the response is always the same: "Wait tell next year." Will the future ever be now for the Cubs fan? Will the Cubs fan ever be able to speak of the future in the present tense?

John the Baptizer, while sitting in prison, tells his disciples to ask Jesus, "*Are you the one... now... or... in the future, should we expect someone else?*" What John was asking was, "Are you the St. Louis Cardinals kind of Messiah... or... are you a Chicago Cubs Messiah?" In other words, "is the future, now... or... is the future still the future?" Ha.

The silliness of lame attempt of an illustration has a Biblical and fundamental meaning for you. In the time of John the Baptizer – for his disciples as you heard in the text – for the children of Israel – and for all (for that matter) the future was now. The one who "shall come," has come. Time and time again in the Scriptures this Messiah had been spoken of and now He stands before them. Seven hundred years before the Savior's birth, Hosea the prophet would say, "*Let us press on to know the Lord... He will come to us as the showers, as the spring rains that water the earth.*" The great prophet Isaiah at about that same time would say, "*Be strong; fear not! Behold, your God will come with vengeance... He will come and save you.*" And I just wonder if John the Baptizer was recalling these words of Isaiah as he sat and suffered in prison with a fate soon to be sealed with death – *Be strong; fear not!! He will come and save you.*

Are you the one? Do we look for another? Beloved, we can't know with absolute certainty, but I have no doubt that John knew exactly who Jesus was even though it might sound as if he was still unsure or had a shaken faith. I have no doubt that John, the one who stood in the Jordan River pointing to Jesus and professed, "*Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world.*" John, the one who professed, "*I baptize you with water, but He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.*" John knew that Jesus was the Messiah. So then, why did he ask?

It's simple. For the sake of those who were following John. John's own disciples needed to know who to follow, who the Messiah was. John would go and have them ask Jesus, so they would hear with their very own ears about the great things that Jesus has done and what He will still do. John would soon be no more... at least as a man who they could follow. But Jesus would carry on. The Words of old would see their reality in the Word of the present. The past is now and the future hope was standing before them!! Jesus the Messiah, the Savior, is here. "Go," John would say to his

disciples, “see for yourself. Ask Him who He is. You will see. Follow the Word made flesh. He has come.”

The Third Sunday in Advent marks a bit of a change during this preparatory season. The rose-colored candle is lit on the Advent Wreath to remind us that this day we transition from words that have a future connotation like, “be prepared,” “make ready,” and “watch” to a present reality when we say, “The Lord is at hand.” The future is now. The Lord is here.

The present hope of our Lord – here now – is a message we desperately need to take to heart. The Lord is at hand – right now. So, what does that mean? There is no more waiting for Jesus. There is no more waiting for Him to come. So, we can’t have a “wait till next year” attitude with our Christian life. Tomorrow might be too late. Some people are a “get it done now” type and others have the attitude, “Why do it today when I can do it tomorrow – or the next day, for that matter?” Now, that might be all well and good for your Christmas shopping, but not for your Christmas life – your CHRIST life. Your life in Christ cannot wait. Today is the day. Your neighbor is in need of your service today. Your family needs to hear the Word of God today – and during our days at home. Take an Advent devotional and start having your family time in the Word at home. Light your own Advent Wreath. The Lord is at hand.

Beloved, we are not “wait till next year” Christians. The future for us is now. It has to be. The reason, we do not know our days or our hours ahead. The “be prepared,” and the “keep watch” has turned into, “the Lord is at hand!” This is the way of our Christian life right now. He is priority. Don’t wait. Don’t wait for the sake of those you know and don’t know – those you love and care about – and for you.

The future hope is now and not yet. Live in the hope now. Live in the hope that is yet to come. Tell of what Jesus has done... just like Jesus would tell those John sent to Him. Tell of the things of our King. Do you have a friend, a neighbor or a relative that you are pretty sure will not be spending Christmas in the Lord’s House? Invite them to join you for A Service on Christmas Eve or Christmas Day. These Services give us a perfect opportunity to ask someone to come to Church with you. And then bring them as we celebrate together the future hope for us in the present reality of Christ’s gifts of love and forgiveness.

Beloved, as we are just days away, and the pace of life gets faster and faster, don’t put off putting Jesus first for the end of your 2013 and then off into the New Year. The joy of Christmas has us look at Bethlehem and smile. God really loves us that much. He came to die – for you. God really loves us that much. Thank God we can say, “The Lord is at hand.” He is – to bless us and keep us and save us.

That silly illustration at the beginning of the sermon really is intended for us to call to mind what we hope to see in the time to come... a ball club that we hope will win in the future... heaven and all its glory. What we see now... a winning ball club today... our Lord coming in His grace and forgiveness for sinners right now. The now and the not yet for us Christians really cannot be separated. Live today in that love of Christ – that He gives today – for the hope of your future. It is a gift given and a blessed hope for today and tomorrow. May God richly bless you and keep you as we step closer and closer to the blessed season of Christmas. Amen.

The peace of God which passes all understanding shall keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.