

You Know What Time It Is...

Sister Barbara Jean Brown, Anamchara Fellowship
Grace Church, Haddonfield
Advent 1, Year A, RCL
December 2, 2007

Romans 13:11-14

You know what time it is, how it is now the moment for you to wake from sleep. For salvation is nearer to us now than when we became believers; the night is far gone, the day is near. Let us then lay aside the works of darkness and put on the armor of light; let us live honorably as in the day, not in reveling and drunkenness, not in debauchery and licentiousness, not in quarreling and jealousy. Instead, put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires.

Did you know...God is not a warm glow somewhere off in the corner of our lives, but a consuming fire?

From Rockefeller Center in New York to the smallest village square anywhere, the lights and trees are in position, bringing cheer to the darkness of a winter's night.

Department store Santas and the abundance of toys suggest Christmas is a time for children. With gaily decorated houses, with Christmas lights shining warm and bright, at night the children are all snuggled in bed, with dreams of sugar plums dancing in their heads.

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Meanwhile, the scripture readings being used in our churches during Advent seem strangely out of place. The words of a wild eyed prophet like John the Baptist or the Old Testament's Malachi seem to come from a different planet. They speak, not of the warm glow of Advent candles, but rather of God's judgment and fire. "You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come?" says John. Clearly the coming of the Messiah is much more serious than child's play. "Who can endure the day of his coming? Who can stand when he appears?" These questions, repeated again and again in the music of Handel's Messiah, remind us that the real message of this season is more difficult than most of us are prepared to hear, one that puts to the test all those easy promises and sentimental slogans of holiday greeting cards.

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One Saturday a group of men were talking about the Christmas that is almost upon them. The men started pontificating like men will often do. They muttered, “Christmas costs too much,” “All the bills show up in January,” “We’re too materialistic,” or “Why can’t we have this Christmas generosity all year long and not just for a few days in December.” To all of this muttering, one man suggested, “A trip of thousand miles begins with the first step.” Miraculously, the conversation shifted dramatically and the men began talking about what that first step might be. One man told a story about caring for his elderly grandma. Another talked about working with the young men at the juvenile court. Still another told of caring for a handicapped person for years. Finally, some one looked at Floyd, good old Floyd, mid eighties, wearing a red bow tie, using a walker, having a face with pronounced deformities

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with his caved in jaw. One knowing man asked, "What about you, Floyd?" Floyd, in his high pitched voice, quietly said, "My wife and I were married for forty years. We couldn't have any children so we raised seventy-two foster children."

Silence. Stone silence. And then the miracle happened. All the men began clapping and clapping and clapping. ... It was just for a moment, for a minute, for a fraction of time, and God walked into the hearts of those men. They were clapping and smiling at Floyd, and they began to think, "What can I do ... to be more like Floyd? What can I do ... to be more generous? What can I do ... to be more giving? "Christmas is coming. What can I do ... to change? What can I do to change the world? Like Floyd...

"And the crowds asked him, 'What then should we do?'"

"You know what time it is... how it is now the moment to wake form sleep."

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When we ask that question, God gets specific. God lists specific actions and behaviors. God said to those who were well dressed, “If you have two coats, give one away. If your cupboard is full of food, give half to the hungry. If you have two blankets, give one who is cold at night. If you are in business, stop cheating. If you are a soldier, stop violence and brutality.” In other words, God’s Word, through John the Baptist, a true prophet, became very specific. That’s the way God is: God always gets specific with our lives. This is not child’s play.

This is not about Nintendos and fruit cakes, Christmas parties and decorations. This is about real living in a real world with real problems and real opportunities.

I, too, would like to be specific. You ask the question, “What can I do? What can I do to live a more holy life?” For all of you who **have** parents, take care of your parent,

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especially those parents who are elderly and need your special care. For those of you who **are** parents, nurture your children with love, honesty and respect. Give of your time, talent and treasure to organizations who work for peace and justice for all people. Take care of a relative, friend or neighbor who needs special care and concern from you.

When God gets our attention for just a moment, a minute, a fraction of time, and we ask the question, “What can I do?” God gets very specific.

“You know what time it is, how it is now the moment to wake from sleep... Amen.

Sister Barbara Jean Brown