

One Minute Left In This Period

The First Sunday of Advent sermon presented by The Rev. Philip A. Rodgers presented Sunday, December 3rd, 2017 at Trinity United Church in Malton, related to Mark 13:24-37

The "one minute left in this period" warning is announced near the end of every period in a hockey game. It is a curious thing – that 'warning'! Maybe a 'time out' is in order to hold things together. Is it time, late in the third period, to pull the goalie when you are one down on the score board? Nevertheless coaches and fans alike seem to value hearing the announcement over the public address system. The "One Minute Warning" sounds an "alarm" that told the crowd "If you're team is way ahead, or way behind, you might want to head to your car and beat the traffic...", and it alerts the coaches to tells the players, "If you've begun to fade or daze, you best get your head back in the game...Take your best shot....you've only got one minutes left!" "One Minute Warnings" are found throughout Scripture, and warnings matter!

We live in an awareness, perhaps even a constant awareness, that each minute is an opportunity, a gift, to receive, to give, to live in a way that says I believe in more than what I see on earth - I believe there is something bigger, someone better, more powerful than any darkness we humans can devise.

All Christ asks of us is that we let Him come - let "Advent" happen, in our hearts and in doing so, be empowered to live with our God, our world and our fellow humans in a way that will not cause us to be afraid or worried or even surprised at the Master's return, but overjoyed.

I love telling the story of the incredibly brilliant yet humble, Ignace Yan Paderewski, the Russian composer-pianist who died in 1941. It seems one evening he was scheduled to perform at a great concert hall. In the audience of black tuxedos and long evening gowns was a mother with her fidgety nine-year old son. His mother brought him in hopes her boy would be encouraged to practice the piano if he could just hear the "great" Paderewski play. So, against his own wishes he came with her. As she turned to talk with her friends, the boy slipped from her side, and without much notice from the sophisticated audience, the boy somehow found his way to center stage and sat down at the stool, staring wide-eyed at the black and white keys, he put his small fingers upon the keyboard. He began to play "Chopsticks." The roar of the crowd was hushed by hundreds of frowning faces turned in his direction. His mother was horrified, and an angered audience began jeering at the boy, booing for him to be taken from the stage.

Backstage, the master overheard the sounds out front and quickly put together what was happening. Hurriedly, he grabbed his coat and rushed toward the stage. Without one word of announcement, he stooped over the boy, reached around both sides and began to improvise a counter melody to harmonize and enhance the tune. As the two of them played together, Paderewski kept whispering in the boy's ear: "Keep going. Don't quit son. Just keep on playing. I'm right here...don't quit!"

That, my friends, is one picture of Jesus. I do not know, maybe to some of you it does appear we are living at the end of time. Perhaps your own personal world may be coming apart and you are at a loss as to how to go on. Jesus stoops over you and bids you "don't quit!" "We have more time!"

The "One Minute Warning" is like Advent. C.S. Lewis once said, "Aim at heaven, and you get earth thrown in, aim at earth and in the end, you get nothing." When we aim only "at earth," when all I am is wrapped up in myself, my world, my issues and my needs, I've lost the meaning of Christ's call. But when we aim at heaven, life here takes on an entirely different meaning.

As the dawn of Advent breaks once again upon us, and as we turn our hearts toward the coming of Jesus, may we pause, take a deep breath, and "aim at heaven." Can we perhaps commit ourselves, again, to the hope that is in Christ, transforming our lives to make sense – even in the darkest of times?

By God's grace, may this Advent open our eyes to the wonderful hope and joy for us in the coming of Jesus. And his "One Minute Warning" is merely a reminder to live knowing that He is here...whispering, "Don't quit. I am right here. Keep on playing...I love you...I am right here, always."

Let us pray: *Almighty God, give us grace to cast asside the works of darkness, and put on the armor of light, now in the time of this mortal life in which your Son Jesus Christ came to visit us in great humility; that in the last day, when he shall come again in his glorious majesty to judge both the living and the dead, we may rise to the life immortal; through him who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.*