



## SERMONS THAT WORK

### Advent 1 Year A

#### No One Knows

[RCL]: Isaiah 2:1-5; Psalm 122; Romans 13:11-14; Matthew 24:36-44

*Note: Eschatological is pronounced “ES-cat-uh-lodg-i-cul”. Eschaton is pronounced “ES-cab-tabn”.*

There is a word that seminary students tend to love – maybe because it’s a big word and makes people feel intelligent: “eschatological”. You can use all kinds of variations of the word, from eschaton to eschatology. But what does the word mean? You have to be able to use it correctly in order to sound – and be – intelligent.

Today’s readings are eschatological in nature. That is, they deal with the end of the world, the end of humankind, the Judgment Day, the destiny of humanity. It’s a funny way to begin the new church year on the first Sunday of Advent – by talking about the end of the world.

So, what exactly does Jesus have to say about the eschaton, the end of the world? “But about that day and hour no one knows, neither the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father.”

What’s the point, you might ask, of Jesus bringing up the end of things just to tell us that we don’t know anything about it?

By telling us that we don’t know about the eschaton, Jesus tells us a lot. It can be easy to fall into the trap of making our faith about the end goal – heaven! As a people who are marked by death and resurrection, we can become enamored with thinking about what God’s *kin-dom* will be like – and, when that happens, we can lose sight of the gift we have been given in this world and in this life.

This separation from the things of the world is a common subject amongst Christians. In the book of Romans, Paul writes that we must lay aside the works of darkness and put on the armor of light. He goes on to list things we should avoid, which he considers to be part of that darkness. The thing is, in telling us what to stay away from, he really shortchanges the world – this beautiful creation God made for our delight. When we are too focused on those things we think of as being dark, when we focus on heaven as

the only place of beauty and goodness, we run the risk of not only ignoring the beauty and goodness of the world but also our responsibility to it.

At the beginning of Creation, when God was busy forming things and Adam was naming all of the things with feathers, or fur, or leaves – God called this good. This world: good. Us, made in God’s image: good. Our lives of faith are not supposed to be focused on the world and creation to come to the detriment of this one – we have been given a mandate to love the place where we are.

Many of us, of course, are concerned about climate change. We are in a climate crisis, and our world is on fire. Given this predicament, it makes sense that we would also be eager to look for the eschaton – another world, coming to save us from this mess we’ve made! Trying to find solutions for problems like climate change can be too big to imagine – too much to bear. The problems are immense, and in trying to address them, we confront our own finitude. Into this particular moment, these words coming to us from Jesus seem particularly important to hear – “about that day and hour no one knows.” Living in the unknown – in what we cannot fathom or plan for – can make us crazy. We want certainty! We want to know how things are going to be!

Unfortunately, that’s not what Jesus is offering us. He is offering us an invitation into the world we are already in – an invitation to *this* planet, to *this* world, to *this* time and place.

How are we to ready ourselves for the day of his coming? Paradoxically, we can ready ourselves to leave this world by truly living in it, by soaking up every grace-filled moment. This Advent season is one that too often comes and goes without our noticing it. We gather family and friends but often focus on the shopping we haven’t done or the menu that didn’t turn out quite like the picture.

Jesus is coming at an unexpected hour – it might be in the moment you have on Christmas Eve. Maybe you will find Jesus in the flicker of candles at church. Jesus might come as your child bursts through the door, happy to be home after the first semester at college. We don’t know when Jesus could surprise us – but we can be sure that it will be in this world, using what has been ordinary and transforming it into something wonderful. After all, this is the God who comes to us in the most ordinary bread and wine each week, transforming these simple elements into food for our journeys.

“About that day and hour no one knows,” says Jesus – today, may this be for us an invitation. Jesus is waiting, ready to surprise and delight. Amen.

*The Rev. Jazzy Bostock is a recently ordained kanaka maoli woman, serving her curacy at St Peter's Episcopal Church in Honolulu, Hawaii. She is thrilled to be back in the 'aina, the land, which raised her, and the waves of the Pacific Ocean. She loves the warm sun, gardening, cooking, laughing, and seeing God at work. She strives to love God more deeply, more fully, with every breath she takes.*