

**SERMON- Proper 28 (A)**  
**Charles R. Cowherd**

Judges 4:1-7

Psalms 123

1 Thessalonians 5:1-11

**St. Timothy's (Herndon)**  
**November 19, 2023**

**Matthew 25:14-30**

**OPENING:**

Our Gospel today, and all the readings today, are about last things  
But today (at the 10 AM) we will have a Baptism which is about first things, new things.

Our readings are about what happens on the Last Day, Judgement Day while...  
a Baptism is about the start of your Christian life, the beginning of the faith journey.

My job this morning in this sermon is to tell you that, somehow, those two—  
seemingly opposite, different things—are actually about the same thing.

That's a heavy lift and I will have to do it all before our Godly Play children get too  
rowdy, and before Miss Mary Emmanuelle, our baptismal candidate, gives me the  
hook with tears or some other emergency.

**CALENDAR**

Good preachers, it has been said, know how to tell time,  
and not only how to end a sermon swiftly,  
it means trying to tell the assembled when in God's time we are located.

Again, a tall order. So I brought props.

This is the Godly Play Calendar, and it depicts the church year in circular time  
format. Every week in Godly Play, one of the students stands up and gets to mark  
the change in week and it helps them understand what season we are in.

Next week is the last Sunday of the church year  
the days are getting shorter, there is less light.

Advent is almost here.

The means something is coming to an end, but something is beginning.

At this moment, the clocks are about to go off and the alarms are going to ring for a  
new time.

What time is it?

Well, we have it made this morning...

as our baptismal candidate's name reminds us that Advent leads us to the Incarnation. 'Emmanuel' means, of course "God be with us."

Incarnation is when God decided that at that time and for all time that God is Incarnate, enfleshed with us, all throughout the calendar:

either as a Baby, or as Jesus in his ministry, or as Jesus on the Cross, or Jesus Resurrected, or, for the most of human history, in so-called ordinary time, God Incarnate with us in the person of the Holy Spirit.

So whatever the date or time zone or season, Jesus is with us all the time.

Our baptisms are reminders of that, they are seals, they are permanent birth mark on our foreheads and on our souls that we are not alone, that we are in God's time and in God's family.

### **SALVATION TIME:**

Now the observant among you, will notice a slight difference between our sacred and secular calendar, that January 1<sup>st</sup>, the secular new year begins not exactly as the church year starts.

The Church year starts with Advent in late November, early December, but our calendar flips after Christmas.

That's okay, those sort of inconsistencies are built into God's timing. For example, Mary Emmanuelle started her life on January 24<sup>th</sup> of this year, and she was given a name, a beautiful name, she has been loved by God and this church for the last 10 months or so.

But her life, in another way, begins in a few moments, that's when she receives her commission, her marching orders. That we make those promises for her, that you all do it for her *in absentia* could not be more of a faith statement, and sign the documents and proclaim the acclamations for her, makes them all the more important.

Now I will yield to our resident Baptists, Todd our Organist, and Rick Wilson, and of course, members of Julie's family about the merits of the timing of baptism. Reasonable people can disagree about Infant Baptism versus Believer's Baptism. We can argue out the finer details of baptismal theology in the Reception following in Henry Hall over cake and punch.

(Whether it's spiked or not will be the key denominational difference!)

Regardless, it's about learning to tell time in a world that sometimes seems to be rudderless, to be pointing in no direction.

I will say this about the timeline, the process, of growing into the full stature of

Christ, about being a member of Body of Christ, about the path of Christian discipleship, of Christian formation.

It's a process and an event. It's happening here, but it's constantly happening.

As an example, People keep asking me, after the Celebration of New Ministry, where I am became the 20th Rector, whether it feels different. And the answer is 'kinda', going from Priest-in-Charge to Rector. My atoms were not rearranged, but sometimes it feels different.

Getting ordained was the same type of thing, it happened slowly and then all at once, and then slowly again. It was putting the collar on for the first time, it was after my first sermon, my first wedding, my first funeral, my first baptism.

That's the process of *becoming* in one's vocation or in one's identity as a parent or a spouse or whatever.

Another example, I might have preached on this before, do you become a doctor when you get your white coat, when you graduate from med school, when you put your white coat, when you heal your first patient, when you lose your first patient?

Today, for once and for all time, the sacrament of baptism will be performed for Mary Emmanuelle today, she is baptized into the one holy, Catholic, apostolic Church. There is no promotion for today, no advancement from this one, including ordination.

At the same time, she will constantly be being formed all throughout her life by her parents, and us the Church, and by our culture. Our job is to be there for her, and to resist those powers that seek to deform her.

To be there when (not if) she needs us. At Godly Play, at the Christmas Pageant, at the Easter Egg Hunt, when she gets confirmed, those times and all the times that she has to resist evil and on and on.

## **ESCHATOLOGY**

So how do you tell time?

How do we wrap our brains around something that is happening today/ right now and then constantly for the rest of our lives?

The big world for it is "eschatology" and we have been learning it in our Matthew series. It means the doctrine of "last things" and Ron can do a better job of explaining it than I can.

The Thessalonians believed in what was called an "imminent" eschatology that salvation, Jesus' return was going to happen soon, within their lifetime.

The Gospel of Matthew with this difficult parable is talking about a “future” eschatology where the Master comes back “after a long time.”

With each, you can work out the ethical implications.

Anglicans/ Episcopalians, we know how to split the difference, and I have been describing our type of Eschatology for you this whole time. Although I bet you have lived your whole life of years and months without knowing it and done okay. It’s called an inaugurated eschatology, We believe in a salvation, in the Kingdom of God that is present “already.... But not yet.”

“already.... But not yet.”

One way to think about it, is that we as Christians, as ones who have heard Jesus’ proclamation, as one who have received the talents from our master, we live in the time between DDAY June 6<sup>th</sup> and the Invasion of Normandy, and VE Day, Victory in Europe, about a year later.

Not literally do we live in 1944-1945, but we live in between time where Now The Kingdom of God has arrived, Jesus has landed on the beaches, is incarnate with us, we can rejoice and join with the Baptized as we celebrated God’s victory over sin and death.

At the same time, take a look around, we are not there yet, there are still Dominions and Powers that exist, and are fighting what sometimes looks like a pretty successful rearguard action. Evil persists in this world in foxholes and bunkers in way that would astonish the Thessalonians who have been waiting for a very long time.

But we know the outcome, we have read to the end of the book, and we know that it’s only a matter of time, before Salvation is here for all of us.

### **CONCLUSION:**

Our Resurrection Eyes allows to tell time, that we are in between Jesus 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Coming, that it is happening all around us, at communion with your neighbor at the altar rail, at the grocery store with the beggar, during song when we join with angels and archangels, and most certainly at the time when we baptize someone and the dove descends and water and Spirit combine to form a new life in Christ.

**AMEN**