

Central Lutheran Church
The Time is Now
November 30, 2025
Romans 13:11-14 & Matthew 24:36-44

What time is it?

No, I haven't forgotten to wear a wristwatch, and I certainly haven't lost the ability to read the large digital display on my cell phone. This morning I'm wondering about the current time in a way that goes much deeper and defies simple answers.

Over the last few years, I've asked myself a question more often than in all my prior decades: "What time is it?"
By this I mean, "what time is it in my own life?"

Like many of you, I pretended I was immortal – or at least lived like I was – for far too long. It took something extraordinary to change my thinking.

My introspection began after I was faced with an unexpected reminder of my mortality. On an ordinary day three years ago, someone sought not only to do me bodily harm but intended to beat me to death. Thankfully, I survived and have continued my ministry as CEO of White Rock Center of Hope.

That experience changed me. It humbled me. And it led me to adopt a new approach to life. While I am not in any hurry to depart this life for the next, I recognize that I cannot know the number of days I have left.

So . . . circling back to that initial question, "What time is it?"

My answer: "It is time that I recognize my own mortality and live well and wisely in light of it. I do not fear the end of this life nor fixate on when it will arrive. Instead, aware that it is coming, I am free to lead a loving life guided by faith."

Whew. That is a heavy way to begin a sermon – especially as a guest preacher.

It is, however, the most honest way I know to begin answering the day's question: "What time is it?"

Perhaps you noticed that today's readings are about telling time. And you may recognize that today feels different than last week or recent weeks.

Today is the first Sunday of Advent, which is the start of a new church year. Last Sunday we wrapped up the prior year by celebrating Christ the King or Reign of Christ Sunday. Today we turn the page. We begin anew.

While not a traditional Lutheran greeting, I think "Happy New Year!" is actually quite appropriate today.

So . . . what time is it?

It is time to celebrate a new church year.

And we begin this new year with a season called Advent that challenges our everyday approach to time by asking us to become people who wait well.

Yes, waiting to celebrate the birth of Jesus, the coming of God in human flesh to live among us.

But also yes to waiting for the second coming of this same Jesus, the One who promises to return and make all things new.

Advent situates us between two comings and invites us to pay close attention.

What time is it? Paul says that it is morning.

In Romans 13, Paul invites us to wake up.

"You know what time it is," Paul says. "It is time for you to wake from sleep."¹

So . . . what time is it?

¹ Romans 13:11

It sure seems like Paul is telling us the alarm clock has sounded, meaning it is early in the morning.

And if waking up is the first morning task, getting dressed is usually not far behind. Paul uses this image deliberately. He invites us to get dressed in specific garments. In verse 12 he instructs us to “put on the armor of light,” then in verse 14 he completes the thought by urging us to “put on the Lord Jesus Christ.”

If this language of putting on Christ sounds familiar, it likely means you are recalling your baptism since we hear those words with that sacrament.

What time is it?

Paul says it is time to wake up and get dressed.

And he reassures us that the outfit we are given to wear is the very one we need to persevere in the challenging world around us. To put on Christ is not to pretend the world is easy; it is to be equipped for the work of love in a world that so often resists love.

What time is it? Jesus says: it is nighttime.

Jesus speaks of keeping awake at night while the world around us sleeps. During the hours when it is hardest to stay alert; when danger or distraction can slip by unnoticed.

Jesus also tells us plainly that waiting for his return is not something we can schedule on a calendar – “About that day and hour no one knows.”²

And to drive home His point, Jesus gives us examples, including:

- Noah. Remember that people kept living their lives as normal until they were overwhelmed by the flood.

² Matthew 24:36a

- A homeowner. The homeowner had no idea what night the thief would break in and steal. If he had known, then he would have stayed awake.

Jesus' message is not meant to scare us but to shape us.

What time is it? According to Jesus, it is nighttime.

In Matthew 24, he invites us to stay awake.

While Paul urges morning readiness, Jesus urges nighttime vigilance. Advent holds both together.

You may remember I began this message with a personal testimony about recognizing my own mortality. That awareness pushed me to take bold, practical steps: to put my earthly affairs in order, to write a will, to communicate clearly with the people I love. Just as importantly, it freed me to live fully every day for however many more days God grants.

Siblings in Christ, I'm not asking you to dwell on your mortality today. Instead, I'm asking you to remember your baptism and to begin this new church year fully committed to walking in the Way of Jesus. It is absolutely appropriate to put your spiritual affairs in order by establishing or re-establishing the rhythms of faith that shape your life and by telling the people closest to you how central your faith is to who you are. And it is essential to live that faith fully every day, because none of us knows the day or the hour when Christ will return.

So . . . what time is it?

- It is day and night and everything in between.
- It is the time to wake up, and the time to stay awake.
- It is the time to remember our baptism, and the time to watch for Christ's return.

Advent calls us into a season of holy waiting – a waiting that is not passive, nor idle, nor sleepy. This is a watchful, hopeful, active waiting.

The time is now. For now, we live awake, we walk in the light, and we keep watch for the Advent of Christ.

Amen.