Doomsday, New Day, and Advent ***Mark 13:24-37***

In 1947, a group of Atomic Scientists created the "Doomsday Clock." It is a large clock face whose hands are set relative to conflict and tension that threaten to erupt into a nuclear conflagration. As of now, it is set at 85 seconds until midnight. As graphic a symbol as it is, the Doomsday clock labors under a major handicap. How do you sustain its "edge" over the long haul? Don't we begin to discount the threat, simply because it hasn't happened yet?

Christians face a similar problem in the season of Advent. Advent literally means "coming." That coming, celebrated in lections and music and candles, is Advent's proclamation of God's approaching realm. The thing is, Advent and the Church have been proclaiming that for 2000 years and counting. And still we wait. How does the Church maintain Advent's hope over time?

For starters: hold fast to Advent's theme of the hiddenness of God's time of coming, affirmed by prophets and gospels. That hiddenness provides a guardrail against arrogant presumptions about timelines for God's coming, a trap that has long snared some. Likewise, the hiddenness of God's time may help recapture the mystery of Christmas. On the calendar, Christmas comes with such predictability that we may forget what a leap of faith it once required: for a frightened teenager with child, for a confused and humiliated would-be husband, for bewildered shepherds, for astrologers shocked to discover the new king resided not in a palace but a barn.

Advent's blending of hiddenness and mystery need not take away from its clear grounding in God's trust-worthiness. In other words: while we do not know WHEN the time will come, we ARE assured it WILL COME. Our gospel text lays down a clear marker: "*Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away*." As in, the word of God's coming and reign.

Without question, that word and hope of God's coming relies on far more than can be measured or foreseen by on a clock face or a calendared date. The word and hope of God's coming comes down to this: can you believe it? More to the point, can you TRUST it? Not merely that a baby will be waiting for us in a manger in four weeks, but that God will be waiting for us at time's end. . . and time's new beginning. Advent bids our answer, which is to say our living in its light.

For Reflection and Action:

What has helped or hindered your sustaining an "edge" to Advent's season and hope?
What strikes you about the value, or challenge, of Advent's hiddenness or mystery?
What are your hopes for this season of Advent at OSLC:
In liturgy; in community; in watchfulness?