

"Behold, I am Coming Soon"

A sermon preached by the Revd. Theodore S. Atkinson at the Oxford Presbyterian Church on the seventh Sunday of Easter, May 11, 1986. Scripture Lessons: Acts 16:16-34; Psalm 97; *Revelation* 22:12-14, 16-17, 20; John 17:20-26.

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

As Christians we confess that Christ will come again. During the periods when the Church has been comfortable and prosperous, this hope of Christ's return has become dim. For a period in the early part of this century it became very unfashionable even to mention the coming again of Christ. This was left to the small sectarian groups on the fringes of the Church. For many in the main-line churches this was a crude and unnecessary belief. Yet this belief has never been entirely abandoned. In the Confession of 1967 our church reaffirmed its belief in the Return of Christ. We confess that "In the power of the risen Christ and in the hope of his coming the church sees the promise of God's renewal of human life in society and of God's victory over all wrong."

That's what the church confesses but what do I personally believe? I believe that Jesus *is* coming as St John wrote in the Book of Revelation. The Bible is replete with statements of the personal, bodily, visible return of Christ to earth. "Behold, I am coming soon!" he avows. Let's take a closer look at what the church confesses about the coming of Christ.

1. *First, we believe that Jesus is already here.* Before he ascended into heaven he assured his disciples, "Lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age." He promised that where two or three of his disciples are gathered in his name "Lo! There am I in the midst of them." St Paul wrote, "Rejoice. The Lord is at hand." The Lord's already right next to you. He's present here and now. Once was the great missionary David Livingstone was faced with certain ambush by a tribe of hostile

natives he almost turned back from bringing the gospel to them. But then he wrote in his diary, "Felt much turmoil of spirit in view of having all my plans for the welfare of this region and teeming population knocked on the head by savages to-morrow. But I read that Jesus came and said, 'Lo I am with you always even unto the end of the world.' It is the word of a gentleman of the most sacred and strictest honor." Because he believed that Christ was really already present with him he pressed on.

2. Secondly, the Church believes that Christ comes to us many times throughout our lives.

a. He comes to us in the preaching of the Word of God. He says, "Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door I will come in to them and sup with them and they with me."

~~In the preaching of the Word of God we hear the voice of Christ and if we have ears to listen and to respond Christ comes to us.~~

b. Christ comes to us in the sacraments. This morning Jesus came to us in the sacrament of baptism. He came and took Drew in his arms, blessed him and promised to cleanse him by his blood. I only baptize with water but Jesus Christ comes and baptizes with the Holy Spirit. Christ also comes to us in the sacrament of the Lord's Supper. The early church prayed at their Communion services, "Maranatha! Come, Lord." They invoked the coming of Christ in the sacrament which pointed forward to his coming at the end of the world. Holy Communion isn't simply a memorial of his death. Christ comes to us in the Sacrament. We truly receive Christ and feed on him in faith.

c. Jesus comes to us incognito, through other people and experiences. He says, "Whoever receives one of these little ones in my name, receives me." He says, "Truly, truly, I say to you, he who receives

any one whom I send receives me." He comes to us in the imprisoned, the naked, the hungry, the thirsty, the sick, and the stranger. When we minister to them we're really ministering to Christ incognito. And one day we hope to hear him say to us, "Inasmuch as you have done it until one of the least of these my brothers and sisters, you've done it unto me."

So in a real sense the coming of Christ is realized in our present life. Christ is always present with us and he comes to us in the preaching of the word, in the sacraments, and incognito, in other people.

3. *Thirdly, the Church confesses that Christ will come again at the end of the world.* Between Pentecost and his final return, Christ's presence and his coming can be seen and heard through faith alone. Millions are unable to see Christ in the wretched of the earth. Millions don't sense that Christ is present recognise him as Lord.

So the church prays, "Come, Lord Jesus!". We pray that the Christ who's already present with us and who comes to us throughout our lives will finally come so that all will see him. We pray that the rule of Christ that has already begun in our own individuals hearts will begin in the hearts of every one. We pray for the total triumph of the love of God in Christ and the ultimate disappearance of every evil power that's haunted human history.

Who is this One who's coming to repay every one for what they've done? It's none other than Jesus; the same holy face, the same pierced hands, the same gracious voice, as long ago. It's the same Jesus who condemned the arrogant, the selfish, and the merciless, but who welcomed every single person who was humble enough to accept the Father's grace. It's the same Jesus whose presence, forgiveness and healing power we've known throughout our lives. Therefore we can say with our Confession of 1967,

"All who put their trust in Christ face divine judgment without fear, for the judge is their redeemer."

Let us pray: Almighty God, whose blessed Son our Saviour Jesus Christ ascended into heaven where he sits at your right hand: Mercifully give us faith to see that, according to his promise, he is present with his Church on earth, even to the end of the ages. And give us grace to wash our robes that in the last day when he shall come again bringing his recompense, to repay every one for what they have done, we may have the right to the tree of life and may enter the City of God; through him who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.