

Already, Not Yet
Psalm 10:12-17; Mark 13:1-8, 24-37

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Years ago, probably when I was in High School, I read a short story that's really stuck with me. I can't recall the name, but I do remember the outline and the basic gist.

It's about a young man who is convinced someday something important will happen to him. Someday, he will have a tremendous insight. Someday, he will have a profound insight of some kind.

And so, he waits. And he waits. And he waits. He goes outside on a beautiful Spring Day but he can't enjoy it. The weather is lovely but his mind is on what is coming. He goes boating on a little pond, but he doesn't notice the scenery. He's too caught up in wondering about his future.

A young woman lives nearby who enjoys his company. She comes visiting, several times, and it's clear she is very fond of him. Affectionate, even. But he tells her he can't build a life with her. He is waiting on something much more important than a relationship. He is waiting on something profound.

The young woman stops visiting. She moves away. She marries another.

The man stays close to home, waiting. He matures, enters middle-age. The years go by, and he waits.

Finally, as an old man, it comes to him. He has a sudden, shattering insight. He has a profound insight, and it shakes him to the core. Something did happen to him, he realizes. He realizes he has wasted his life. He has wasted his life waiting. He has wasted his life in waiting.

All those years opportunities came to him. All those years there were chances to make a difference. But he wasted them. He wasted them waiting for something to happen. Something profound.

Our New Testament lesson today is very confusing. The language is deeply symbolic. To fully understand every nuance requires a deep understanding of Jewish apocalyptic literature. For nearly 2,000 years scholars have been spilling barrels and barrels of ink on this text trying to decipher every minute detail and nuance.

So, I'm not going to try.

Instead, let me share with you the gist of this text. Just a brief outline of why it matters. What makes it so important.

Jesus has already come. In his life and death Jesus tore down the walls of race, anger, nationalism. Jesus taught us how to live well in a state of loving relationships. Jesus established the Kingdom of God here and now as a way of living with each other in God's love. In him we are one. Jesus has already come.

Jesus has already come, but Jesus is also with us now. By the power of the Holy Spirit, Jesus is with us now. By the power of the Holy Spirit, Jesus is as close as the breath in our lungs. Guiding us through life, holding us close, helping us live in the network of loving relationships that is the Kingdom of God.

Jesus has already come, but Jesus is also with us now. And one day, in God's good time, Jesus will come again. One day, no one knows when, Jesus will come to us in his full glory. In the beautiful, artistic language of Scripture, the heavens will cease their light and the Son of Man will come in the clouds. In other words, we will experience Jesus in his divine fullness.

Until then, we are living in the time of Already, Not Yet. Jesus has already come to us, but Jesus has not yet come again. In the

meantime, we are living in the spiritual Kingdom of God: doing ministry and living in loving relationships.

And what does that look like? What should we be doing in this time of Already, Not Yet? We should be doing what Jesus did. We should be doing what Jesus is calling us to do. Feeding the hungry. Caring for the sick. Making peace between frustrated, angry factions.

We can't be putting it off for the right time. We can't be waiting for the right chance. We can't be waiting until we're the right age or we have the right pastor, or the time is perfectly right in every respect. We have to be doing it now.

How sad it would be for Jesus to come back and find us sitting on our hands, waiting. How sad to die and meet God face-to-face and have God ask us why we were waiting, why we wasted our lives?

That small child who needs just a little attention, just a little patience and help? Turn around twice and that child will be graduating from High School and moving away.

That family needing just a little help, just a few resources, until it's too late and they collapse and fall apart.

That sad soul who's crying out for just a little attention, a little kindness, but we're too busy and it's too awkward – and then, it's too late.

There's plenty of time to meet the new couple who's just moved in at the end of the block, get to know them, until they move again.

There's plenty of time to reach out to our parents, to heal that rift between us. There's plenty of time, until the hospital calls and says there's not.

There's plenty of time to start that new ministry, to jump in there and make that difference, until there's not.

I don't know how long this in-between time will last, how long we'll live in this state of Already, Not Yet. I know Jesus has already come and has established the spiritual Kingdom of God here on earth, but I have no idea when Jesus will come again in glory, nor do I have any idea what it will look like. Speaking for myself, I hope it doesn't happen for a long, long time. Because there's still a lot of reconciliation and reaching out to do. There's still a lot of difference to make. May God be with us while we're busy not waiting. Amen.