

## 面對時間

講員：歐陽瑞琳傳道

教會：美國麻州 波士頓台灣基督教會

日期：2018 年 12 月 9 日

節期：待降節第二主日

經文：路加福音 3:1-6

這個月是 2018 年的最後一個月。年尾，大家都很忙；忙到趕不赴時間，遲到，甚至連禮拜都來不及。今天正是教會曆設計好來面對時間的最佳時機。

待降節的原文是 *Adventus*，意思是「來臨」(coming)，由上帝採主動，再次來到世上。所以，翻譯成「將臨節」，或許比「待降節」更貼切。

在將臨節期，經課集的經文，催使我們面對時間。當 2018 的月曆撕到最後一頁時，就是教會曆的再一個新的開始。當我們等待聖誕折扣商機時，我們好像更應該急切盼望主的來臨。我們常常以為將臨節是在預備慶祝聖嬰耶穌的誕生。其實不是這樣，將臨節期的重點是讓我們預備耶穌基督的再來。今天是我们修正觀念的好時機。

仔細推敲將臨節期的經課經文，我們會發現經文涵蓋時間軸的兩端：一端是起始，一端是終末。向左看是起始的尾聲，向右看是含苞的終末。

施洗約翰，是先知時代的最後一位先知，他代表的是起始的尾聲。瑪拉基遙指主的再來，在他手指下，終末開始滴答、滴答的響起，終末如花苞徐徐展開。

我們聽到約翰沙啞在喊：「著為主準備道路，為著伊修直小路。」

瑪拉基的警告，其實常常聽到，每次聽韓德爾的《彌賽亞》時都會聽到：「獨獨祂來 è 日，啥人當會起？祂顯現 è 時，啥人 khiā 會 tiâu？因為祂親像鍛鍊過 è 火。」

我們都是受召來為主預備道路，將祂的道路修直，我們都知道有一日祂會忽然來到。置身在過去和未來之間，我們身處時間兩端的中間。在這特別的位置，我們該如何面對生命的每一日，面對時間？其實教會曆和經課集有教導我們如何面對時間。在這數位數據時代，靠 Facetime 就可讓不同時區的兩方瞬間面對面。在這千變萬化的時代，唯有上帝的話永不改變。所以，我們人須靠上帝的話讓我們知道如何面對時間，以致能面對上帝。我說的不是指如何節省時間，而是更根本的——合乎上帝心意，由真理建構的時間觀。

教會曆和經課集怎樣教導我們如何面對時間呢？

教會曆節期中，只有將臨節期不屬於歷史內的時間。聖誕節期、大齋節期、復活節期、五旬節期都是歷史事件，已經發生了。將臨節期是超乎歷史時間的。將臨節期第一、第二、第三主日的經文都是終末的景象，有關重新的創造，到第四主日時才是孕藏萬千。教會曆以將臨節期為首，就是以終末、永恆的時間做基底；終末就好像萬有引力，我們牢牢地被這引力牽引著，以這樣的終末的引力，終末的視野，我們的每一日與教會曆所涵蓋的耶穌的一生，時時刻刻交織在一起，這就是以馬內利！

注意，教會曆不是由聖嬰耶穌的誕生開始。教會曆的第一個節期是將臨節期，將臨節期不是聖誕節期的序曲，將臨節期的重心不是預備心慶祝耶穌的誕生。教會曆不是循序漸進的描寫耶穌從嬰兒長大成人，成為最終的審判者。不要以為是聖誕、大齋、復活、五旬、將臨。畫錯原點了。教會曆是從終末開始，要告訴我們，超越時間的上帝，創造時間

的上帝，成為嬰兒。那審判者、鍛鍊者、鍊淨者，疼愛我們以至於踏入時間、邁入受造與我們同在。阿拉法，俄梅戛成為嬰兒。超乎想像的榮耀，我們的以馬內利！

仔細讀《路加福音》21（將臨期第一主日）和《瑪拉基書》3 這兩段經文，我們看到將臨期劃開了終末，我們也可以說，將臨期是有關天啟的節期——揭示末後的事情，來讓我們知道如何定位時間。將臨節期不是為了預備聖誕；在此節期，我們不該聯想到聖誕老公公、聖誕鐘聲、平安夜。

當你專心聽約翰，瑪拉基時，你覺得他們的聲音圓潤悅耳嗎？將臨節的調性是肅穆的，不和諧的，因為他與我們的舊我不協調，和人的天性衝突。

聖誕的商業氣息塑造我們，利多的折扣讓我們開上平坦的快速大道，在百貨商場的紅地毯上流流忘返。教堂彩繪玻璃上的聖徒或終末的故事從我們的生活裡消失；玻璃櫥窗裡的人偶成為孩子有記憶以來的楷模。

或許可以說我們的成長偏離了正道，我們在將臨節期的重心擺錯了，自然的受商機教化，只慶祝聖嬰耶穌。若不面對鍛鍊的火，將內心的衝突、聖俗的混濁燒成灰燼，我們無法深刻的體會待降節蠟燭煦煦的聖光——盼望、平安、喜樂、仁愛。將臨節期不是一個恬適的週期。唯有開啟將臨、終末的眼光，我們才能真正的面對時間、照著上帝的時間觀來數算一生的日子。

在年終歲末，忙透了的時候，我們來到上帝的聖殿與主內的兄弟姐妹相聚，相偕來聽主的話。上帝的話臨到在曠野裡的約翰。約翰不是在耶路撒冷的聖殿服事，雖然約翰父系和母系都是祭司家族，但他刻意被取名為約翰，而不是小撒迦利亞，就暗示了他會以新的方法服事。他從宗教的權力結構脫離，在曠野裡宣講。上帝的話藉著約翰臨到我們：我們的信仰是困於脫序的權力結構中嗎？我們企圖在舒適圈裡聽上帝的聲音嗎？只要是不悅耳的、逆耳的聲音就把它消音嗎？

將臨節就是要讓我們聽平常聽不到的道理，那麼令人緊張、只好重新檢視自己。上帝的話很清楚，藉著瑪拉基和約翰，祂不滿我們過日子的方法，祂要我們回轉，越轉身，預備祂的道路，走上祂的正路。瑪拉基和約翰問我們：

「祂顯現 ē 時，啥人 khiā 會 tiāu？」（瑪 3:2）

「誰會以悔改和認罪來預備主的道路？」（路 3:3,4）

「阮 tloh án 怎 oa't-tng？」（瑪 3:7）

今天的好消息是什麼？有嗎？有的！因為主的日子忽然來到時，沒有人能站得住，所以上帝召我們悔改。祂召我們悔改，這就是好消息！在這時刻，站在時間軸的中界，上帝讓我們有機會省視自己如何奉獻服事。祂讓我們自問：

我們是不是憑公義獻供物？（瑪 3:3）

瑪拉基的聽眾是利未的子孫、猶大和耶路撒冷；所以，我們也來檢視我們教會群體如何事奉主。我們來看我們的禮拜生活。

我們知道我們常常以 Facetime 來與人聯繫，讓我們也來看看我們與上帝的聯繫是什麼狀況。我們就看主日禮拜就好了。我們來看主日禮拜的祈禱、宣講、詩歌是否真的與主

連結？我們的禮拜是徒有形式，還是禮拜中就是上帝國的雛型，愛與公義、與神與人都和好？

在這個將臨節的第二主日，讓我們先不為自己的工作、學校、健康祈求而讓我們一起回轉、認罪、祈禱：

“鍛鍊的上帝啊，我們沒聽從你所差來的先知。我們沒讓路，沒讓你在我們的生命中、教會中、社群中掌權。赦免我們，我們祈求，與我們重新立約。”

在這天啟進入終末的時候，我們仔細聽瑪拉基與約翰。上帝的信息不是表面的安撫，而是銳利、刺入骨髓的。審判和喜樂是協進的。假如今年的將臨節講道把你震到了，使你重新認識教會曆，重新面對時間，那大概是上帝的話臨到了你（申 30:14）。

在承先啟後，時間的中界，在此時此刻，讓鍛鍊我們的神鍊淨我們，拋光之後，或許我們就可反映上帝的榮形。我們沒被上帝放棄，丟了就沒機會重塑，我們有幸被鍛鍊，更像基督。上帝照著所立的約鍛鍊、潔淨我們，這真是好！

將臨節時，未來誕生了！我們有新的眼光面對時間，所以，我們知道我們其實是從終末出發。我們以敬畏的心情，預備主的再臨。現在，我們能憑著公義，獻上和諧的心聲：救主坐雲燦爛臨到！

### Face Time

This month is the last month of the year 2018. Many of us are super busy in this time of the year. We are so busy that we often lost track of time and run late to meetings, even to worship services. Today is the designated time to talk about time.

In Advent season, through advent lectionaries, we are pushed to face time. The end of our 2018 calendar year is where we start our next church liturgical calendar. While we wait for the Christmas discounts, we are supposed to wait for the Advent, the coming. We are accustomed to think we are preparing to celebrate Christmas, the coming of baby Jesus. It is high time to be awakened that we are primarily waiting for the second coming of Jesus Christ.

When we read the scripture passages carefully, we will find that the lectionary readings wedge us between two times--the end of beginning and the beginning of the end.

John, the last prophet, represents the end of the era of prophets. Let us think of him as the end of beginning. Malachi points us to the coming of the Lord. The day of his coming is ticking, Malachi signals that the beginning of the end is here.

We hear John crying out to us: “Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight.”

Malachi's warning echoes every year when we sing Handel's Messiah—(3:1, 2, 3) "But who can endure the day of his coming, and who can stand when he appears? For he is like a refiner's fire (3:2).<sup>1</sup>

We have already been called to prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight. We know that the Lord will come suddenly. Located between past and future, we are in the middle of time.<sup>2</sup> The church calendar and lectionary readings actually teach us how to orient our time, how to live in the middle of time. In this era of Facetime, wherein everything is changing instantaneously, we need the unchanging word of God so that we can face time and ultimately God—not in the usual everyday manner. We need to face time, truly.

How does the church year and lectionary teach us to face time?

Among the seasons of the church year, Advent is not about historical time. Christmas, Lent, Resurrection, Pentecost happened in historical time. Advent is time beyond time. The scripture readings from Advent 1, 2, 3 are about the last things, the eschaton, the new creation and ends in pregnant impossibility. (Advent 4) The church year starts with eschaton, eternal time. The eschaton is our gravity wherein all our days are pulled to. With this gravitational anchorage, we live our days intertwined with the story of Jesus through the liturgical seasons. Emmanuel!

The church year starts not with Christmas or baby Jesus. The first season of church year/calendar is advent. Advent is not prelude of Christmas. Advent is not primarily about our preparing to celebrate the birth of baby Jesus. The trajectory of church year is not baby Jesus grew up and became the final Judge. It is not Christmas then Lent, Resurrection, Pentecost and then finally Advent. The church year starts with Advent, pointing to us the timeless God who creates time, the Judge, the Refiner, the Purifier love us so much that he enters into created time to be our Emmanuel. The alpha and omega becomes a baby. The glorious impossible!<sup>3</sup> Advent breaks open the eschaton, look at Luke 21 (Advent 1) and Malachi 3. In this way, Advent is apocalyptic. Advent reveals the last things, our true orientation. Advent is not pre-Christmas. It is definitely not Santa Claus, not Jingle bell, not even Silent Night. When you hear John and Malachi, would you describe their voices as cheerful and gallant? The tone of Advent is solemn. It is discordant because it conflicts with our natural self, our old self.

---

<sup>1</sup> 5. Bass Recitative — Haggai 2:6, 7; Malachi 3:1

"Thus saith the Lord of Hosts; Yet once, a little while and I will shake the heavens, and the earth, the sea, and the dry land; And I will shake all nations, and the desire of all nations shall come."

"The Lord, whom ye seek, shall suddenly come to His temple, even the messenger of the covenant, whom ye delight in: Behold, He shall come, saith the Lord of Hosts."

6. Bass Air — Malachi 3:2

"But who may abide the day of His coming? and who shall stand when He appeareth? For He is like a refiner's fire."

7. Chorus — Malachi 3:3

"And He shall purify the sons of Levi, that they may offer unto the Lord an offering in righteousness."

<sup>2</sup> Han Conzelmann, *The Theology of Luke* (German original: *Die Mitte der Zeit*/"The Middle of Time").

<sup>3</sup> Madeleine L'Engle, *The Glorious Impossible*.

We have been shaped by commercial Christmas. In the Christmas season of good deals, our days have been transported from church aisles to shopping mall aisles. The highways from our homes to malls are really smooth.

We no longer remember the stained glasses depiction of saints and end times. Children are imprinted with mannequins and rush for count downs in Time square. In the aisle of shopping malls, we are prepared a straight way to the secret of another Victor (Victoria's Secret vs. Christ the Victor). In a way, we are malformed and gradually forget what Advent is truly about. Its focus has become Advent of baby Jesus, Only when we confront the conflicts through refining fire, are we able to reach the warmth of the advent candle lights—hope, peace, joy and love. Advent is not an easy season. With the lens of Advent, we are then equipped to live time according to God's time.

Out of the holiday buzzy ness, we drag ourselves out of the buzzing noise. Here, with the community of fellow brothers and sisters in Christ, we listen to the word of God.

The word of God came to John, in the wilderness. Not in the temple where his priestly father serves. John, the child of two priestly stock (Elizabeth and Zechariah, maternal and paternal grandfathers were priests), serves God in a radical new way. He is detached from the established structure, he is in the wilderness. The word of God comes to us through John. Have we been too well off in our comfort zones that we have tuned out the cries that evoke discomfort? Have we been tuning into human powers, or power structures that have departed from God himself?

Advent is the time to hear the terse messages that jolt us into discomfort. Through the word of Malachi and John, the word of God is clear. God is not pleased with our lives, repent and return to His way. Prepare His way, walk on his way. Malachi and John together ask us:

Who can endure the day of his coming? (Malachi 3:2)

Who will prepare the way by repentance and forgiveness? (Luke 3:3, 4)

How shall we return to God? (Malachi 3:7)

It is good news that now, we are called to repent because we cannot even endure the day when he comes on that final day. We have time before the SUDDEN day. It is good that God allows us in this middle of time to examine the offerings we have been presenting to him. He prompts us to self-question: "Am I presenting offerings in righteousness?" (Malachi 3:3).

Malachi addressed the descendants of Levi, Judah and Jerusalem. So, let us focus today only on our corporate offerings. Look at the worship life of our church. Contrasting with the frequency of connecting with people over Facetime, how have we truly connected with God, through prayer, through proclamation of the word and through music in our Sunday worship services? Is our worship service a mechanical habit or the habitat of the faithful? In this second Sunday of Advent, instead of praying for jobs, schools, health, or any kind of personal needs, let's return and confess:

“Refining God, you have sent us prophets and we have not listened. We have not made way for your reign in our lives, our church, and our society. Forgive us, we pray, and renew your covenant within us.”<sup>4</sup>

In this apocalyptic time into timeless eschaton, let’s listen carefully to the proclamation of Malachi and John. Godly messages are not about superficial comfort, it stings. Judgment bonds with joy. If the Advent pulpits this year alarm you, pushing you to face church year and time in a new way, then we know the word of God through Malachi and John has come near you (Deut. 30:14).

In this middle of time, let the Refiner purifies us so that our sheen actually reflects the image of the Refiner (*Imago Dei*). The good news is that we are not forsaken and left unchanged but is being refined to become like Christ. When we are refined and purified as God promises, it is good.

Advent is the birth of future. We learn that the end is our beginning, we learn to face time in a true way. Therefore, we look forward to his second coming. We are able to sing in awe and concordantly lift our offerings in righteousness: Lo, he comes with clouds descending.

### **詩歌 Music Hymn planning**

Instrumental Prelude: 球根內有一蕊 sui 花 In the Bulb There Is a Flower. PCT 2009 Hymnal #630.

1. 請來請來以馬內利 O Come, O Come, Emmanuel. PCT Hymnal #143.
2. 救主坐雲燦爛臨到 Lo, He comes with Clouds Descending. PCT Hymnal #144, not in the 2009 Hymnal.
3. “Hymn of Promise” by Natalie Sleeth.

---

<sup>4</sup> *Feasting on the Word: Advent Companion*, 26.