

In 1968, the US was providing air strikes and limited ground forces to the French government in Vietnam aimed at getting rid of the threat of Communist takeover.

It was to be a quick in and out.

During that year, the Communist regime of North Vietnam launched the Tet offensive to gain ground and hooked the US into a long-drawn out involvement in the conflict.

Some of you served in that conflict – some of you lost loved ones because of it.

If you lived through that time, you remember that Anti-war sentiment in the US began to rise.

In addition, anyone thought to have Communist leanings were persecuted.

The thorny political issues were whether or not to provide polio vaccines to all citizens

And keeping out foreigners who might bring Communism into the country.

Although the Congress and American people would not find out for over a year, In March of 1968, US troops entered the village of My Lai in South Vietnam and brutally massacred the inhabitants.

This sparked even greater protest movements in the US.

About a month later, Martin Luther King, Jr. was killed.

And a month after that, Robert Kennedy was assassinated.

The Democratic National Convention being held in Chicago was marked by significant violence between police and protesters.

In November 1968, Richard Nixon was elected president.

One of his first executive actions was ordering the secret bombing of Cambodia to oust communist rebel forces.

In the wake of the unrest these events triggered, In 1969, Robert Lamm wrote a song for the rock group Chicago that asked two important questions:

- Does anybody really know what time it is?
- Does anybody really care?

From his understandably skeptical perspective, Lamm answers “No” to both questions – nobody has the time except to cry and to die,

- People running everywhere
- Don’t know where to go
- Don’t know where I am, don’t have time to think past the last mile.
- Have no time to look around
- Run around and think why.

Does anybody really know what time it is? Does anybody really care?

These questions speak to our time, too.

...

When we consider our Bible readings today, we see that it is important that we be aware of the time.

But it is not the time on our watches or smartphones that is important.

It is not the hour and minutes we need to know.

The time that is important is **when God will act** to deliver us from these times of evil and violence.

The only time that truly matters is the time of redemption – the time of God’s intervention in our world when Christ returns.

Preparing for that time is the theme of Advent.

- The days are coming, says the prophet Isaiah.
- Be ready, for I will come suddenly, at a day and hour you do not know, says Jesus.
- You know what time it is, says the apostle – it is the time between the darkest night and the dawn of a new day.

If you have ever kept an all-night vigil,

or pulled an all-nighter for schoolwork,

or been part of a 24-hour “thon”

– then you know that the hardest time to stay alert and vigilant is between 3 a.m. and 6 a.m.

From the dead of night to the break of dawn.

What helps is knowing that the dawn will come soon.

because knowing that the long night will soon end

in the light of the sun rising

gives renewed hope and energy to finish out the night.

This is the time we know.

We know that the hour of great evil will soon yield to the hour of Christ’s triumph over evil.

We know the day of our redemption is near, even if we do not know the precise hour and minute.

We know that we are in a time of darkness that will soon be over.

We know that we must prepare for the activities of the day.

Now is the time for hope and preparation to meet our Lord and Savior.

Now is the time for shaking off the tiredness and lethargy of surviving the night.

For doing battle with the forces of evil within us.

For putting away the things we know we shouldn't do and living to make our Lord proud.

Now is the time for getting ready

for the great coming of our God

**that will reveal the end of all wars and wickedness
by God's righteous judgment.**

...

When a nation prepares for battle, it converts its resources to weaponry and forces to fight with.

In farming communities in the ancient near east, that meant converting farm equipment into armor and weapons

– turning plows and pruning hooks into swords and spears.

But when the war is over, those weapons are converted again into implements of life instead of death.

Now is the time for melting down the weapons of war and reshaping the swords into plows and the spears into pruning hooks.

You know the time – the dawn is coming.

God's dawn is coming

– and the One who rises to bring light and life to the world ravaged by the forces of darkness

is Jesus.

He has already defeated all the forces of darkness by his death and resurrection.

Now he comes to reveal his victory to the whole universe.

When he does that, those who belong to him will be revealed, too – they will shine like the sun.

Now is the time for us to lay aside the works of darkness and put on the armor of light.

No longer do we fight darkness with darkness, evil with evil, violence with violence.

Now – together with our Lord Jesus – we conquer darkness with light, evil with good, and violence with peace.

Now, like Noah and the homeowner, we protect what belongs to the Lord because he may come at any time to claim his people.

Does anybody really know what time it is?

Yes – it is the time to make ready for God to come and put everything right.

For he is coming any day now.

1968 is in the past, but the forces of darkness that marked it are still with us –

- ISIS,
- US war crimes in Afghanistan,
- covert attacks,
- police brutality and its aftermath.

In recent weeks, we have seen a rise in hate crimes in our land –

- violence by whites against people of color, Jews and Muslims, and against immigrants in general;
- violence by straight against gay and transgendered persons,
- violence by adherents of one party against those of another,
- by students against one another in bigotry and prejudice

As those who really know what time it is and who care about that time,
As people of faith in Jesus Christ as our Savior and Redeemer,

Let us stand up against such actions of hatred and bigotry.

Let us stand up against those who would kill unarmed children of a different skin color calling them trash.

Let us stand up against those who bully and intimidate others who don't share their point of view.

We know what time it is. Our redemption is near.

**Let us live as is fitting for Jesus,
putting on the armor of Christ's light.**

So that when he comes – whether in our next breath or 500 years from now – we will be ready to stand confidently before him.

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