

All We Have Is the Present
Sunday, November 29, 2021, 11:30 a.m., All Saints Church, Pasadena
The Rev. Alfredo Feregrino

As part of my family tradition at our house during the Holyday season we always watch “Scrooge” which is a 1951 film adaptation of Charles Dickens's novel: “A Christmas Carol”.

In fact, we just watched the movie again after our Thanksgiving meal a few days ago.

There are many versions of this classic but the one we like the most is with Alastair Sim as the main actor.

Are you are familiar with this film?

Just in case, I am going to summarize it for you.

The story of this Christmas Carol starts on Christmas Eve 1843, with Ebenezer Scrooge the main character at his money-lending business in London, where he constantly mistreat his employee the “beloved” Bob Cratchit. Scrooge does not like Christmas, because of painful memories from his younger life, so on Christmas Eve day, he refuses to give to charity and rejects his nephew, his only living family... Remember?

He has become very cold, a person without compassion.

The same night while Scrooge is preparing to go to bed, he is visited by the ghost of his former business partner, Jacob Marley, who had died seven years earlier.

Like Scrooge, Marley the ghost, spent his life accumulating wealth and exploiting the poor, and as a result, Marley is forced to walk the Earth as a tortured spirit for eternity.

This ghost warns Ebenezer Scrooge that he risks the same fate, and that he has one final chance for redemption, and that he will be visited by three spirits: The Ghost of Christmas Past, the Ghost of Christmas Present, and Ghost of Christmas Yet-to-Come.

Basically, these spirits call Ebenezer Scrooge to be watchful, to be alert and to pay attention.

These spirits do not tell Scrooge what to do... their task is just to show him what **was**, what is, and what could **be**.

It is up to Scrooge to repent and to create a new beginning. To start again anew.

During the film, the spirit that most caught my attention was the Ghost of Christmas Present, and I will explain later why.

In the gospel that we just heard today, Jesus calls us to be on guard, to be alert, to be watchful.

Some commentaries point out the fact that admonitions to be on guard and to be alert were common in early apocalyptic literature.

We have to remember that this particular passage was written shortly after the fall of Jerusalem in the year (70 CE) of our common era, so the original audience, the earliest Christians to whom this gospel was addressed, in their collective memory were familiar with the devastating events of their immediate past.

So, the purpose of apocalyptic literature in general terms was to call the believer to evoke hope in the midst of crisis.

These earliest Christians expected Jesus to return within their lifetime to judge the world and to inaugurate the kingdom of God, and as the years passed, some of them gave up hope and lost the faith that Jesus would ever return.

And Jesus as we can see in this gospel, does not reveal when he will return.

So, if the time is unknown, then no one can expect a warning of his arrival.

The only solution is to be on guard, to be alert, and to be watchful.

Be on guard (v.34), the gospel reminds us, be alert at all times.

The only solution is constant watchfulness, which can only be done by being in the present.

Yes, by being only in the present.

But what does it mean to be on guard, and watchful in our time?

What does it mean to be on guard, and watchful in the present?

I guess we cannot be on guard, or watchful if we are living in the past and we cannot be attentive, alert or watchful if we focus all our attention on the future. Right?

All we have is the present. All we have is this precise moment.

Many times, we allowed ourselves to be so afflicted by our fears and worries that we tend to lose perspective of our present reality.

We tend to lose perspective of our present time.

We tend to think about the future and what it might bring.

Be on guard so you are not weighted down with the worries of this life. (v.34) - the gospel reminds us-

We worry about the future in terms of finances, in terms of health for ourselves and for our children, for our love ones. We worry about our parents, and who would take care of them. We worry about our jobs. We worry about our economic stability.

We worry, worry and worry.

I do not know if you have heard this, but someone once said that worries are like prayers for what you don't want. And as the gospel said this can be a trap for us.

And all these worries and fears distract us from seeing what is beyond. All these worries and fears distract us from knowing that God is in charge.

That God is in charge in our present. That God is at work, here and now.

All these worries and fears distract us from knowing that God is at work, walking with us in our present time in this precise moment.

All we have is the present. All we have is this precise moment.

And this brings me back to the Spirit of Christmas Present, (that I mentioned at the beginning), who transports Ebenezer Scrooge around the city, showing him images of people engaged in joyful festivities and also images of deprivation.

It is in witnessing these scenes of suffering in the present, that Ebenezer Scrooge was confronted with his own lack of compassion for humanity.

It is in the present that he was able to see the results of his denial and rejection of the poor and destitute and those around him.

It is in the present that the character of Ebenezer Scrooge transforms from a man who only cared about himself and his wealth to a man that cares about others.

Yes, it is in the present that this transformation was possible because he was able to recognize the power of the now in creating the possibilities for a completely new future.

All we have is the present. All we have is this precise moment.

And you know what ...this present time, this precise moment is loaded with possibilities.

It is in the present moment and with God's help that we can become powerful co-creators with God and give birth to new possibilities, which create new beginnings.

Yes, but how do I do this? We may ask...

Like Ebenezer Scrooge, we can create new beginnings.

And we can create new beginnings by making the call that we are afraid to make,

We can create new beginnings by asking for forgiveness or by forgiving those who wounded us, by spending time and being present with our loved ones.

We can create new beginnings by being aware of the impact that our actions have on everyone around us.

So, in this season of Advent, a time of expectation, a time of new beginnings loaded with new possibilities ...I invite you to use this season as a time of deep reflection.

This gospel begins with what sounds like a warning about a time to come when signs will appear in the stars, when nations will be in anguish and people will be in fright with anticipation of what is coming upon the earth.

But guess what:

God is in charge. God is in charge in our present. God is at work, here and now. God is at work, walking with us in our present time in this precise moment.

The gospel is telling us to pay close attention in the present moment because it gives us the ability to walk with God through any adversity that comes.

So, I invite you to be watchful, to be on guard, because if we are paying attention, with God's help we can create miraculous changes in our lives, and in our world.

These is the good news that this gospel proclaims.

AMEN