



northminster presbyterian church

2400 old alabama road
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03-Dec-2006 First Sunday In Advent

SCRIPTURE: Jeremiah 33:14-16 Luke 21:29-36

SERMON: Don't Zone Out (Rev. Dr. Jim Simpson)

Many of the city buses in New Haven, Connecticut, have a sign on the back in large letters "Don't Zone Out." The signs are there to encourage people to pay attention as they drive so they won't hit the back of a bus stopped to pick up passengers. I want to apply this message: *Don't Zone Out* to your Advent experience this year.

To make the most of Advent: "*Don't Zone Out*", but listen to and for God. Listen actively and attentively because God always has a Word for us. God always has something to say, something worth hearing, *so listen*. Expect God to address you in some way. As you worship, as you read the Scriptures, as you sing hymns and carols, as you take a time to read the devotional booklet, as you engage with the NPC Advent blog, as you meet friend and stranger, as you pray for the world, as you go about your daily tasks, God has something to say to you *so Don't Zone Out!* Listen attentively and actively to and for God. This was the encouragement the disciples received from Jesus when they pondered on their future and the world's future. Be alert at all times; *Listen to and for God!*

To make the most of Advent: "Don't Zone Out" but listen to and for God, listen critically. See if you can make the connection between the following reports from the Police blotter:

Sullivan, IN: A man was in critical condition after emergency surgery for a stab wound after he and a friend attempted a robbery.

Putnam, CT: At 3 a.m. two gunmen confronted 15 to 20 people standing outside a Wal-Mart store and demanded money.

Fresno, CA: Two people arrested after a crowd trampled people in a parking lot.

Manchester CT: A man was beaten and robbed after being surrounded by five men.

Englewood, OH: Two men wearing black ski masks and sunglasses hold up 2 store employees at gunpoint.

Allentown, PA: A teen robbed by a man who tapped on his car window with a handgun.

Lexington, KY Someone fired BB pellets from a passing vehicle at people waiting outside a Best Buy store.

Henrico, VA: Police fired to get the attention of an unruly crowd of about 350 waiting in line outside a Target store.

McLean, VA: Police fired pepper pellets Friday morning to subdue a rowdy crowd of about 200 people outside a Circuit City.

The link? All these cases involved people determined by hook or crook to "acquire" the new Playstation 3 video game console. And there is still a debate about whether such games cause violence? *Even buying a video game caused all this violence.*

If we listen to unfettered consumerism, if we accept at face value any idea or product will complete our lives, if we sell out to those who hawk their wares to us, if we get ourselves into debt to buy a symbol of success, then we will have been listening to the wrong message. Don't Zone Out – listen for God... *critically!* Test the real meaning and value of all the messages you will hear – *and listen for God.*

To make the most of Advent: “Don’t Zone Out” but listen to and for God, listen purposefully. Listen with the purpose of living changed lives; lives renewed and refreshed because we live closer to the way God hopes we will all live.

Today, we have entered this Season with the words of Bonhoeffer ringing in our ears. We need to replicate the great courage demonstrated by the Confessional Church in Germany in the 1930’s. The banner that symbolizes their Confession of Faith, written to affirm the Lordship of Jesus Christ, is the banner about which many people comment, given that it includes the swastika, the graven image representative of a hated and vile doctrine and regime. But always, *always* remember that the swastika is crossed out by the much, much greater symbol: *the Cross*. The symbol of and for Jesus Christ. Despite the flames of hatred and violence, the cross reminds us of God’s loving purposes in the world.

In the place and time in which we find ourselves, what is the symbol of the message or movement or world-view that represents a “clear and present danger” to the Christian Church today, in the same way as the swastika did in the 1930’s?

I would suggest that the swastika could be replaced with a Pound sign or a Euro sign or a Dollar sign or the sign for any and all of the world’s major currencies. These currency symbols represent a world gone mad for things, as evidenced by the fights and violence over Playstation3! We also see people rushing over the edge into debt having bought into the idea that the newest gadget or trinket will bring meaning or significance to their lives. Money twists our values to breaking-point. What else can explain the now-abandoned plan for a division of the FOX empire to publish the OJ Simpson book, “If I Did It”, telling how he might have murdered his ex-wife, though not admitting he did. By the way, the last time I looked, the bid for illicit copies of the book were at \$2,200! Our currency symbols remind us of misplaced values where some are up and some are down; a *requirement for someone to make a profit!* Yes, we could put our money symbol right there! The scary thing is that we find the need to own and win and gain so difficult to resist. Difficult to resist because we are so enmeshed with the benefits of this system. You see, I like some Fox shows “House” and “24”. Sure their news coverage is quite unbalanced, but I like Jack Bauer and Dr. Greg! So would I have been prepared to give them up if the OJ book came from the same stable? We find the love of money so difficult to resist because this very thing that is our enemy is also a thing from which we have gained so much and which has enabled us and lots of good people like us to do so much good – as we build churches, as we assist the poor, as we endow schools.

Recognizing our dilemma and our need to be right with God let us be quick to listen!

Listen.... the One for whom we wait transcends the world's symbols of value. The advent of Jesus stakes out God's commitment to the world, to the whole world poor and rich, the arrival of Jesus necessitates a new way of living - giving not getting.

Whether we are ready or not, the presence of Jesus with us and for us puts an end to all arguments and prognostications; *the world's way is not the way!* The world’s way, the way of division and domination, the way of grasping and greed, the way of me-me-me and more-more-more, the way of pride and prejudice, the way of violence and vengeance, symbolized by our money symbols is not the way that reflects the goodness of God, it is not the way to God, *it is not God's way!* This Advent let us listen to the voice of God in Jesus Christ so we can follow the way that God has for us. *So Listen! Listen attentively! Listen actively! Listen purposefully! Listen critically! Listen God is coming into our midst! Listen! Amen.*

Jeremiah 33:14-16

14The days are surely coming, says the Lord, when I will fulfill the promise I made to the house of Israel and the house of Judah. **15**In those days and at that time I will cause a righteous Branch to spring up for David; and he shall execute justice and righteousness in the land. **16**In those days Judah will be saved and Jerusalem will live in safety. And this is the name by which it will be called: “The Lord is our righteousness.”

Luke 21:29-36

29Then he told them a parable: “Look at the fig tree and all the trees; **30**as soon as they sprout leaves you can see for yourselves and know that summer is already near. **31**So also, when you see these things taking place, you know that the kingdom of God is near. **32**Truly I tell you, this generation will not pass away until all things have taken place. **33**Heaven and earth will pass

away, but my words will not pass away. **34**“Be on guard so that your hearts are not weighed down with dissipation and drunkenness and the worries of this life, and that day catch you unexpectedly, **35**like a trap. For it will come upon all who live on the face of the whole earth. **36**Be alert at all times, praying that you may have the strength to escape all these things that will take place, and to stand before the Son of Man.”

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