

Sermon by Rev. Lusmarina Campos Garcia  
Based on Matthew 24:36-44  
Geneva, 28 November 2010  
(video version available [here](#)).

What is the time to start construction?

When we decide to build something we plan for it; we decide on the architecture, we organize the schedule, the finances; we hire the contractors and try as much as possible to ensure that our planning is accomplished successfully. Careful planning is important. However, those who build know that even when the plans are well organized and the resources sufficient, the end is not completely sure. Who builds, builds in hope.

Building in hope is living with the expectation of what might happen. It is dreaming with a possibility. It is investing in an option. It is not necessarily a settling experience, for building in hope can be as chaotic as the traffic in Geneva nowadays. The unexpected can happen. And most probably it will happen, but we still have to plan, and believe that what we have planned has a chance to be accomplished.

I believe this is what the Gospel this morning is trying to communicate. It is important to have a plan; it is vital to be ready for the construction. How our plan is going to be changed and at what time it is going to become part of a larger plan is not our decision. We just have to be ready. And being ready might mean, being flexible, being attentive, being aware that the construction is not only yours. It might mean, know where you stand, so you are free to take an unknown direction. It might mean, take your tool box for the time has come. "The Son of Man is coming at an unexpected hour", "therefore you must be ready". The unexpected requires readiness.

The Gospel reading this morning is part of apocalyptic literature. It speaks of the return of Christ, sometime in an unknown future, but definitely in judgment.

Scholar David Lose says, "as foreign, or even frightening, as the coming judgment of the Son of God might be seem, it is an inescapable element of the biblical witness. And for good reason. The flip side of judgment is justice. The dominant rationale for judgment in both Old and New Testaments is, in fact, how well we accord with God's concern for how we treat one another", how we implement justice in our midst and in the world. "So, give up any notion of God's judgment and you've also abandoned any meaningful sense of God's justice, of God's determination to hold us accountable for how we treat each other and the creation."

Judgment and justice go together.

I watched recently the Argentinean film, "the secret of your eyes". The film is about a crime. There is a newly married couple. The woman is killed. The husband, who was deeply in love with his wife, sits every day at the train station watching thousands of people, trying to identify the killer. After a while the police closes the case without finding the killer. But the husband doesn't give up. He continues going every day to the train station observing thousands of people. A detective is moved by the husband's persistence and re-opens the case. He identifies the killer. The killer had connections to the politicians and was freed long before the term of his sentence. The sense of justice was broken, and the husband could not live with that. He decided that the sentence had to be fulfilled. Therefore, he bought a house in the countryside, improvised a prison in one of the rooms, kidnapped the killer and kept him in the prison he had built within his own house. After about 20 years the detective visited the husband and found out that what had happened. The husband had taken food every day to the killer, but had never spoken with him. When the killer saw the detective, he started shouting, "ask

him to speak with me! Ask him to speak with me!"

I have no idea how the day of the judgment will be. I have difficulty to think of it as a specific time, a cosmic event. And I do not believe in a God that sends people to hell forever and ever. However, justice is an essential feature of Godself and therefore, this world and our lives are to be measured in the light of who God is and how God wants us to be. We are accountable for our actions, or the lack of them.

I do not believe that God's sense of justice matches the way the husband in the Argentinean film punishes the killer of his wife. But I am convinced that there would not be a worse punishment than God ignoring us, not speaking with us. And the experience of an injustice not being repaired is too deep.

What is the time to start the construction?

The time to start is now. The time to finish is not ours to decide.

This advent season we are invited to build in hope. We are invited to imagine possibilities still not known, to plan for a road not yet designed, to set the tracks of a path that we are not sure where they will take us. What we know is that there is one stop that is certain, Bethlehem. And perhaps that is going to be the last stop.

We do have a plan, but as you know, plans might be changed unexpectedly. Any way, are you ready?