

Up until a month ago or so I'd never heard of earthquake insurance in the midwest. Now all of a sudden people are taking out policies, packing away china, having earthquake drills, and visiting friends who live someplace safe, like California. Ken Browning has predicted the end of the world for the New Madrid fault. He says there's a 50-50 chance of an earthquake in the next few days. As far as predictions go those are not very ambitious odds. A 50-50 chance is another way of saying, "Either there will be an earthquake or there won't." Some priests I know are having a party tonight to watch the whole thing on TV. The invitation reads, "If it really does happen, won't it be nice to be standing next to someone who can give you absolution? <sup>(for your sins)</sup>"

I'm sure the confession lines in southern Missouri are longer this weekend than they've been in years. If you were warned the end of your world was near you'd probably try to get a few things done. That, quite simply, is Advent. It's a warning that the end is near. It's an invitation to get a few things done.

Jesus describes waiting for the end of the world with a metaphor about waiting for the master's return. ~~He~~ He says when the master goes away the servants have no idea when he's coming back. The companion limps a little in the twentieth century. If anyone goes away they can stay in touch by telephone, fax, ~~the~~ ~~computer~~ computer, or an appearance on the Oprah Winfrey Show. But in Jesus' pre-technological day, if you were gone, you were gone, and no one knew when you might return. That's what it's like now with Jesus. Ever since the Ascension, he's been away. He doesn't telephone; he doesn't fax. And like a college student, he doesn't write. We just don't know when he's coming back.

We don't know when, but at least we know that he's coming back. ~~He does~~ We know it because he tells us. He tells us so that when the end does come, no one can complain there's been a lack of communication here. We won't be able to blame Jesus that he knew all along there'd be an end of the world, but no one ever told us. He wants us to know. He's not withholding information. He wants us to know the end will come ~~without~~ suddenly, so we can be prepared.

We've all suffered a sudden loss: an unexpected death, loss of job, damage of property, or loss of self-esteem. Often the end comes long before we're ready. Just ask the Royals.

When Advent warns us the end is near it invites us to get a few things done. If you knew the end of your world was coming December 25, what would you do? Who would you see? Who would you call? And what would you say? Do you know what it would be? Could you, could you do that before Christmas? <sup>12/25/90</sup> December 25 won't be the end of <sup>your</sup> the world ~~either~~. But it might be the beginning.