St Aidan’s Episcopal Church

FIRST SUNDAY OF ADVENT

Jeremiah 33:14-16

Psalm 25:1-9

1 Thessalonians 3:9-13

Luke 21:25-36

Advent of Yesterday

All of us who call ourselves “Christians” read and inwardly digest the scriptures, live into our Anglican traditions and apply reason wherever we can. That being said, we all live in a state of unknowing about what God has in store for us at the end of life, as we know it….as individuals who live, breath and depend on the life of the world. On this spectrum of unknowing, all humans share a mindset planted somewhere between total disinterest or apathy about our mortality to more than a little anxiety about how the end of each of us, or for the world, might look and feel.

Faithful Christians, regardless of their denominational roots, also live out their lives somewhere between these two extremes; some cautiously dismissing the whole idea of end times with convenient and reasonable rationale or conveniently not even thinking about it at all; or some, living with a low level of guilt around misdemeanors gathered in life and their inevitable accounting which will not stand up too well on judgment day!

No matter where we are on the spectrum of fear and trepidation, Jesus words ring through the ages to us today. "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, like a trap.” To put it another way. Don’t waste your time with worrying but be prepared. Stop making things worse by pretending they don’t exist. Do something. Do anything. And, for the love of God, stop warring with each other hoping for payoffs in the future and pay attention to things that work for life in the here and now. If you persist in indulging in the status quo, you will find yourselves trapped by all you would like to escape. If you want to see God at the end of it all, then do God’s will now.

In a way, Jesus’ words make more sense to us today, than they did to his audience back in the day. They had no capacity to understand the end of the world in the way we do today. We live with the capability of a modern-day apocolypse and deep down in our souls, so far down in fact, that we scarcely recognize it’s existence, lies humanly real fear that the bottom of all we love and hold dear is going to give way any time soon.

Our understandable human response to that possibility is to carry on in all our extremes, from inward asceticism to out and out violent knee-jerking anger. Underlying the entre spectrum of those very human reactions is one common denominator: fear of the unknown.

The people of Jesus’ time contemplated signs in the winds and the sea, but life would go on as before with no unusual disturbances save the falling and rising of cities and nations, manipulation of kingdoms, cruelty, beauty, war and peace.

It is much the same for us, yet on a wider stage. We look back at history and can visualize past mountains now made low and valleys now made level. Yet today, news of each disturbance to peace or the quality of a tranquil life occurs with increasing awareness at a local, national or international level, each passing by at equal speed, only to be replaced by another. We are less horrified by the horrific than we have ever been in the past and so we are called now, with more profundity than we ever have been in the past, to stop. To stop wringing our hands, shaking our heads and to begin preparing for a new way. It is not too late for you and for me, and it cannot be too late for the child born this morning, or for the little ones preparing to look around at the world they are about to inherit.

So, what is it, in God’s name, we are to do?

Perhaps, we begin by looking at what we have been doing since the time of Cain and Abel and see what has worked and what has not. Next, we can look a little closer at what Jesus is proposing and at what he is saying to us on this first day of Advent.

At first reading, we think about apocalypse…the end of the world. We imagine the cosmos suddenly in turmoil, climate change reeling out of control, the oceans rising up into continual tsunamis, the earth scorched and burned, leaving nothing but the wind to sweep it all away. We think of it as something far beyond our time, something to be dealt with later, by somebody else, while we continue on within our personal cocoons of comfort, sticking our heads in the sand in in an effort to ignore the hour-glass of speeding time.

Reading closer, we begin to realize that Jesus isn’t telling us to build a better bomb shelter. He isn’t advising us to simply wring our hands and hope for a better tomorrow. Jesus is telling us to rise up to all that we have the capability to be, to face what must be done now rather than later.

In his own day and in our own, Jesus is calling us to deeper and more profound awareness of just how delicate our world is and just how fragile life in all its forms becomes because of that delicacy. Jesus is calling us to take it in hand now and not pretend that doing nothing will somehow make all our problems slide out of sight and mind.

It take fortitude and steadfast determination to realize that, no matter how seemingly insignificant, or how broadly impactful it may be, each of us has a call to attend to some aspect of that earthly fragility in order to bring renewal and hope into its future existence.

To continue to refuse to acknowledge our own finitude and that of this planet, is to adopt a mode of living that directs us away from the call to all that God provides for us in the present moment. We don’t want to think about the end of anything…ourselves or the world. We want to keep on living forever. But we must take care not to think that salvation becomes more to do with escape from our fears of tomorrow than it does the embrace of what is here for us to protect and defend today.

We must take are that our hope does not become misplaced and skewed, as if pushed beyond reality by the fragility of life, tempting us to hide from it all by out-performing those actions which we believe will somehow shield us from failing to reach the next level of living beyond this earthly life.

Jesus doesn’t want us to live this way. It is burdensome to think about having to continually guard against some sort of reckoning which could preclude our opportunities to enter into the Kingdom of God. We were not created to live with some sort of idea that one day Jesus will come and sort it all out with a that’ll show ‘em mentality. To think of living with the subconscious notion that justice will be done only when Jesus returns, is to live with an almost passive, leave-it-to-Jesus frame of mind, which isn’t helpful to the possibility of living life as God would have us live it.

Whatever issues the earth and its humanity, its flora and its fauna face now, we are no longer able to simply stand and wait for someone, somewhere to fix it, nor are we able to simply expect that things will run their course and somehow fix themselves. We are certainly not to depend on God to simply show up and wave a magic wand so that all our issues would disappear, no matter how much part of our hearts long for something like that to happen. God never was, is not and will never be the doctor for all of our ills. God is not the cause of the issues, whether the issues be climate change, world hunger or a pandemic. God is *within* all our issues, large and small, with us as we work for change and the betterment of all involved.

If ever there was an explanation for what Advent means, then this is it. As we think of hope on this First Sunday of Advent, we can think of each moment of our lives as both fragile and eternal, to be used in positive, uplifting, life-giving, life-renewing ways.

American Baptist, Benjamin Mays, credited as a founder of the civil rights movement, had a favorite poem which he like to quote. You may know it, it is called: *“I have only just a minute.”*

*“I have only just a minute,*

*Only sixty seconds in it.*

*Forced upon me, can’t refuse it.*

*Didn’t seek it, didn’t choose it.*

*But it’s up to me*

*to use it.*

*I must suffer if I lose it.*

*Give account if I abuse it.*

*Just a tiny little minute,*

*but eternity is in it”*

He must have liked its message that within each moment lies the possibility and potential of the eternal present which is not to be wasted by dithering around with worry, rather than taking definitive action.

He must have understood Jesus’ message to the people in his own time. Jesus came among them and is among us as an example of what it means to be, what theologian Paul Tillich calls “the New Being” in times gone by and in our time today. A New Being, called to think differently than the prevailing trends of the time. A New Being, called to face our fears and to recognize ways in which we can counterbalance them with heartfelt dedication in the work for justice and peaceful existence.

To walk in the way of Jesus, then, is to consider the role each of us has to play by modeling Jesus’ example of living as a “New Being.” To be new, to be renewed into a different way of being in the world.

To walk in the way of Jesus, is to hear his message and to enter into living as if each moment was the last.

What was the last thing you said in that moment just gone for ever? To whom did you speak? What was your thought? How did you respond to another in that moment? For what reason? What will you do in the cause of liberation from the oppressors of earth and all that lives upon it?

On this day of entry into Advent, 2021, even as we can understand and, in a sense, be at ease, with the uncertainty of what God’s plan is for the future, we can be forgiven by asking how to interpret the meaning of waiting, how we are to wait, and what it is we are waiting or…a beginning or an end. They are good questions and very human.

To wait for either does not mean we should not prepare ourselves to meet each. While God has no expectation of us regarding knowing what is to happen next, we are still not expected to just sit there. Waiting is not an exercise in inertia. We are called to be alert, to be awake and aware, to embrace a spirit of anticipation. To be wakeful today implies present activity and active preparation in our waiting for what is to come. To he faithful to God’s call, does not mean that we simply succumb to whatever will be, but rather we are to actively anticipate that the hand of God will absolutely be at work and will be worth waiting for when it is at last revealed.

To be sure, Advent brings with it the message of waiting for the Light of the World. That message carries with it a time for remembering that God has come to us in Jesus Christ and that Christ will come again. It is through remembering this that we find our hope for what is to come. Yet our Advent message today calls us to a particular kind of self-assessment. The kind that brings us into a place of preparedness, reminding us to consider God’s coming re-creation of the world, and our part in that re-creation, as we prepare the celebrate the incarnation of Christ already happened.

Never before has the message been so plainly made by the world as it is now at this Advent time. It is an Advent of yesterday, today and tomorrow and the world is waiting for us to act. With the coming of Advent, the coming of the Light, comes the renewed hope that each small step we take from moment to moment from this time forward, will save it.

Amen

Written to the Glory of God

E.J. R. Culver+

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