

Advent 1 (Hope) Year C: 1 /2 December 2018
St. James' Episcopal Church, Clinton NY
The Rev. Gary Cyr

“What Advent offers, is an invitation into a deep humble reflection on how we order our lives, how we live into the revealed truth that God’s Love is eternal.”

Jeremiah 33: 14-16

1 Thessalonians 3: 9-13

Luke 21: 25-36

Psalm 25: 1, 3-8

On the Saturday following Thanksgiving (or should I say following Black Friday), I happened to be talking on the phone while looking out the front parlor window when I noticed a police vehicle with its lights flashing moving slowly, creeping quietly up to the top of the street. I wondered what was happening at this early hour of the morning as the officer never got out of the vehicle whenever it did stop. It looked as if they were waiting or looking for something. And they were. Several minutes later I began to observe runners coming up the street. Call it what you will –Christmas run or Turkey trot – these runners were pacing themselves for the race ahead. I saw folks dress as elves, some in Santa gear, others with reindeer antlers on their heads, even some in red union suits complete with flaps in the back, and peppered throughout were kids of various ages. Thus, I thought, is the holiday season ushered in.

As the clock ticks down towards Christmas, reminding us of the number of shopping days left, I can sense the more hurried pace starting to take hold. Folks scurrying about in stores, parties are being scheduled, businesses in full marketing mode, and all of us being inundated with a flurry of sale flyers. Ah, yes! The Christmas season is upon us, when in fact it is only the start of Advent– the Church’s New Year.

In contrast to the hectic pace and commercialized frenzy that surrounds us, the Church invites Christians into a more reflective posture; a somewhat pensive mode. Quite the difference from the merriment and the deluge of syrupy sentimentality that we are bombarded with on a daily basis. Even in hearing today’s readings, I sense a more somber tone than I expected. These readings, once again, focus on the eschaton – the end of time. Eschatology isn’t

a marketable product and you won't find Happy Eschatology greeting cards in any department store. Yet, it's a very Christian message. Not one of doom and gloom as might be expected. But one of hope and of a promise fulfilled, yet not fully realized.

Jesus is simply saying to his followers that one must live with expectant hearts. The time one finds themselves living in may be troubled and difficult, but they will pass. Just as a deciduous tree moves through the seasons from buds to foliage, to abscission, or the dropping of its leaves, then into dormancy, so too does our own life cycle. As the book of Ecclesiastes states "for everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven - a time to be born, and a time to die; a time to plant, and a time to pluck up what is planted; a time to kill, and a time to heal; a time to break down, and a time to build up" (3.1).

It becomes fruitless for the disciples to ponder what the calamities of the day foretell. It is a colossal waste of personal energy to try and calculate when this proverbial "end-time" will ensue. Frankly, the signs are already there. Jesus is striving to help his followers grasp the significance of his message, what his life's purpose has been all along. That the kin-dom of God is near. It's at hand, even though it's not fully realized.

The eschatological fervor of this passage is that of a new heaven and a new earth. A new start from the passing of old ways of being and understanding. And that frightens people. Any time we are faced with uncertainty or the notion of change, we worry and get anxious. Have you ever caught yourself saying "I've never done that that way before" or "that's how I've always done it"? That sense of control we naively cling to no longer has relevance. At least from the human point-of-view. It never mattered from God's perspective. And that is what Jesus is imparting.

Things, as they are, **are not** as God intended. They weren't in Jesus' time and they sure as heck are not in ours. The whole of scripture testifies to this truth. Too many people are enslaved to myopic understandings of the world we live in, limited by one's point of being that takes for granted the plight of others who are different, who are oppressed by systems of privilege that foster injustice. Our myopic understanding allows varied forms of subjugation to occur. NO! Things are definitely not as God intended. Hence, God enters into the human narrative in and through Jesus.

Jesus understands there will be a new heave and a new earth - a new ordering, a new reality - and he ushers that into being. The mystery of the kin-dom of God is that it is both now

and not yet; it is here but not fully realized. Though the signs are there, the time has not yet come for its fulfillment. His disciples seem to be having a difficult time comprehending the message. No surprise there. After all, most of them weren't plucked from the intellectual cream of the crop. And from what we read about Peter, he doesn't come across as the brightest bulb in the package most of the time. I wonder if **we** truly understand this eschatological message; this concept of both now and not yet. Our journey through Advent is one then of a journey into a deeper comprehension of this mystery.

The frenzied activity of this festive season casts a veil over Christmas which distorts its revealed truth, the true nature of holiday. Christmas doesn't simply recall Christ's first coming, it's Christ second coming to which it points: the fulfillment of the eschatological promise. That time has yet to fully manifest. And that is what we are now preparing for. We know that Jesus came into the world. Now we await his coming again. Not as a child, but as a savior. Not as a sovereign but as liberator.

Thus, are we invited into a posture of deep reflection in preparation for that return, that second coming. We know God's Kin-dom has been ushered in through Christ Jesus, we also understand it has yet to be fully realized. However, we do get glimpses of it. Moments when its realization breaks in. All we need is to be open to seeing, hearing, experiencing that Divine Love which infuses all life.

This revealed truth is a transcendent reality that is found in the living of our daily lives. It is found in the ins and outs of life - our daily struggles and concerns. Jesus is saying that we need not be concerned about our troubles and doubts, the ruckus and discord that surrounds us. For God's love is eternal. That will never pass away. Imagine all of life's challenges being superfluous to God's Love. Not our love for God, which is fleeting and often dependent on our emotional state, but on God's Love towards us - those whom God calls beloved. It is that love that Jesus embodies and which ushers in God's Kin-dom. We glimpse and experienced this breaking-in of God's Kin-dom each and every time we share this Love with one another. Those are the moments that reveal God's desire and intention for creation and to which Advent points.

We need not run away from the discord that surrounds us; we need not escape into crazed commercialism. What Advent offers, is an invitation into a deep humble reflection on how we order our lives, how we live into the revealed truth that God's Love is eternal. Advent

is, thus, an expectant time were we prepare to receive the fullness of God's Love in Christ Jesus. A love that surpasses all understanding – a love that was, a love that is, and a love that always shall be. That Love is Immanuel – God' with us. May each of you have a Holy Advent.