

East Hartford
Advent 1 2013 Dec 1

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Isa. 2:1-6, Psa 122, Matt 24:36-44

Wake Up!

Advent, as we say in the liturgy of the Advent wreath, is that time of Waiting and Preparation.

I wonder, what kinds of waiting do we know??

We are just home from Vermont and snuggle time with Lincoln Robert, and I am reminded, parents and grandparents know the time of waiting and anticipation, from the knowledge of pregnancy to the time of birth.

We all know something of the waiting for Doctors, test results, diagnoses and treatment outcomes.

Most recently we know the time of preparation and the waiting in anticipation of the Thanksgiving meal.

Then, of course there is the waiting captured in the phrase, "Are we there, yet" in all its variations, combinations, permutations and intonations.

All of these times of waiting are times with something of a known fulfillment. A woman has a due date, the thanksgiving meal is set for 2 o'clock, and barring some kind of travel mishap the adults in the family have an estimated time of arrival.

We also know the times of preparation.

The amount of getting ready for that new baby,

the preparation of the big meal,

the planning, preparation, and packing that happens before the car ever leaves the driveway on the vacation trip.

Yet, for all of our experience with waiting and preparation, when we think of waiting and preparation for the coming of the Christ, about the best we can do is worry about how much still needs to happen before Christmas morning.

The very idea that the church calls us to be waiting and preparing for the second coming of the Christ, causes our eyes to roll, induces long and heavy sighs, and some among us mumble, "there goes the Church once again -- being totally irrelevant -- out of touch with real life!!!"

After all, doesn't 2000 years count for something? The Church has been keeping theologians, booksellers and librarians employed debating the Second Coming for twenty centuries. But, it seems, the 2nd Coming is still in the realm of not yet and not soon.

In every generation of the Church, some wonder will the “Day of the Lord” come in our time, while others shrug off the wondering and turn their attention elsewhere.

In the interest of full disclosure, transparency, and true confession, I am squarely in the “turn my attention elsewhere” camp, when it comes to the Second Coming of Christ, the End of the World, the Rapture, the end times.

Here is the way that I “unpack” it all. I believe, God is. I believe when we want to know God, when we want to learn something more of God, we need to take long loving looks at Jesus of Nazareth. When we want to see God, we need to soak ourselves in the Gospels that tell us of Jesus; “soak” as we soak would soak in a hot tub, or as we would “soak” in the sunshine of a June afternoon. Let us soak in the stories of the first coming of Christ, so that the second coming of Christ happens within us, in the ordinary lives that we lead, in the ordinary and the extraordinary ways that we love - God, one another, and all of God’s creation.

Now then - hold on to that thought - that the Second Coming of the Christ happens within each of us as Christ is formed within us as we practice and learn more of the ways of God, which is to say, as we practice and learn more of the ways of love. Hold on to that thought as I tell you an old legend as best I can remember it.

It seems, there was a monastic community that had located, in the ways of monastic communities, in a rather secluded part of a large rural area - an area noted for its natural, if wild beauty. This community of monks had fallen on rather hard times, and where there were once a hundred brothers in the monastery, now only six remained, and it seemed that survival of the community seemed unlikely. The gardens showed evidence of neglect, as did the entire facility. The brothers were tired, sad, sometimes cranky.

There were always one or two guests who came to the monastery to make silent retreats. The brothers remembered when the guest house was full.

One day a guest knocked and asked if the community would provide hospitality for him. They opened the door to him and guided him to a room in the guest house. He stayed for several days on silent retreat, then asked to speak with the Prior of the abbey.

The visitor told the Prior that he had a message for the community - a message from God. After handing the prior a note, he went on his way, saying only that he hoped to return one day. “Oh and by the way,” he said, “Don’t speak of this or show anyone that note for at least 5 years.”

Life went on in the monastery as usual for some time, except that

occasionally one or another of the guests asked if they might stay and become members of the community. Slowly, the community showed signs of new life. Repairs were made, gardens were better kept, more productive. There seemed to be a new spirit about the community - a spirit of hope and kindness and peace.

It was just 5 years later that a local reporter asked to interview the Prior about the new life and energy in the monastery. So the Prior told him of that earlier visitor and the note that he had left behind.

“What did it say?” the reporter asked.

“Ah -today is the 5th anniversary of that visit,” the Prior said. “I’ve kept that note ever since he gave it to me. Would you like to see it?”

“Of course”

The Prior reached deeply into his pocket, pulled out a folded, worn piece of paper. He held it out to the reporter who opened it with care. The ink was faded but legible. There was a single line written on the paper. The reporter read it aloud. “The Christ is among you. Be kind.”

The Prior went on, “ever since the visitor was here and left that note, I have begun to see that Christ is really among us. I see Christ in each of the brothers, in all the people who deliver goods to us, or who make repairs, and

all the guests.” He paused, smiled at the reporter, then went on, “Yes, I see the presence of God in you as well.”

“That is the only change and that has changed everything about our life together. We now see and respond to the Christ within and among us.”

Wake up, my friends, be alert. Christ is coming again. Constantly-within and among us, within and among all people. Be on the watch. Be ready to meet the Lord.