

November 27, 2016

Advent – Be Ready

PRAYER

May the words of my mouth be mediations of our hearts, be always acceptable unto thee. O Lord our strength and our redeemer. AMEN.

Sermon

As you know we have entered the season of advent. The season of Pentecost or ordinary time has come to its end and we are beginning a new church year. Sometimes that gets a little bit lost, we get so focused on Advent Christmas that we forget that we are starting a new year. And we always start in Advent with readings not about the coming of Jesus but the season always starts with a message about the return of Jesus. In the gospel reading for this morning, we have Jesus telling his disciples; it says that the first sentence of that reading is actually an editorial comment. They were over on the Mount of Olives, and if you've ever been to Jerusalem you know that the Mount of Olives sits here, the Citron valley here, and then Jerusalem. You can see the temple mount from the Mount of Olives. And so Jesus is sitting at a place with his disciples where they can all see this point of contact, the temple. Where the sacrifices are made, where the seat of God on Earth is present in the holy of holies. And he takes this time and this overview to tell the disciples about the next coming, when all this will come to an end. It's about the end of our creation. But he puts it in such a way that it doesn't really give us a picture of what actually takes place.

He presents it with the idea and the understanding that nobody knows when this will take place. He's very clear about that. Jesus over and over again is clear about not knowing the time, the day. And we human beings who consider ourselves Christians spend so much time and effort trying to figure out, is this today, is this the time, are the things that we see depicting what John saw in his revelation. Is it time for Armageddon? Is it time for the end of the world? And whenever that conversation comes up, my initial response is, you don't know, Jesus said we wouldn't know. And it's not up to us to know. What are you going to do about it if it was? What are you going to do to be more ready than you are right at this very moment?

What Jesus says to his disciples is that be ready. It doesn't matter that you know or don't know when all this will all take place. You are called to be ready. You are called to live out your lives as citizens of the kingdom of God. And if you are doing that, and of course he is telling the disciples before the resurrection, that if we are doing that in light of the resurrection, in light of the fulfilling of the promise that Jesus is in fact the Messiah, that he is the sacrifice for the forgiveness of sins. And that we stand in that truth and we stand in that promise, then what we are called to do is what he was asking his disciples to do. Be ready! Be prepared! Live it out daily. Live it out daily.

It's always amusing to me to read in the epistles and we see it in several different places. And the epistle reading for this morning was one of those where the author is saying, "You know the time is

closer now than it was before.” Now we’re talking somewhere in the vicinity of 50 A.D., okay. And the author is convinced that the time is close and he is encouraging the church and the members of the church to live their lives in such a way to be ready for this second coming. To becoming what God wants us to be. That Jesus has shown us that God wants us to be. And to have an anticipation that now is the time or if it’s not today, maybe it’s tomorrow. And we are reading these letters 2000 years later. Two millennia have passed and here we are. We’re still anticipating, we’re still waiting. And we’re still trying to guess is this the time? Are we very close to when God will say the time of creation has come to its conclusion? And that begs the question are we ready? And more personally am I ready?

And I was trying to contemplate that, I was trying to figure out what do I say about getting ready that I haven’t already said or that you haven’t already heard. And the answer that came up fairly quickly was not much. Not much! As Paul had said to some of his churches you know what to do. You know what to do. Live peaceably with your brothers and sisters. Worship God in the living of your life. Acknowledge God and Jesus Christ in the living of your lives. In the decisions that you make as you’re dealing with others. In business and in daily life. And I try to think well that’s going to be a really short sermon. And although they’ll probably like that, you’d probably ought to say something else. So don’t leave just yet.

I was thinking Advent starts the new church year. We start our calendar with the season of Advent, the first Sunday of Advent. And I was thinking well you know for New Year’s we always have the tradition of making resolutions. Trying to look and anticipate the coming year. And most of our New Year’s resolutions for the calendar year are trying to be better for ourselves. And that’s what we’re talking about our looking at the new church year. We are called to improve, to be better citizens of the kingdom of God. And what would I say, what would my resolutions be as we’re looking at the new church year. My resolutions, not necessarily yours! But I have some suggestions for you too! So don’t feel like you’re left out. Last year was a hard year! We say that almost every year but this last year has been a really hard year in our country. We’ve seen so much anger and fear living out of our lives. Politically in our lives as we look at the destruction and violence that has been perpetrated some by terrorists, others by people who seem to think that life isn’t worth terribly much. And my resolution is to try to put that behind me, the fears, the anger that I’ve felt. And to be more positive in dealing with one another. With the people around me. The people that I disagree with. You know sometimes people thing that because you are a priest, you are so nice that you don’t ever disagree with anybody. Let me clear up that little myth.

You know we all have our own understanding, we all have our own ideas about what is right and what is good and what should be. And sometimes when you hear something to the contrary, you want to say something. And you can say something but it doesn’t have to be insulting, it doesn’t have to be a statement of you know I’m right, you’re wrong. It’s time for us to look at each other as individuals with opinions and that’s okay. And that’s alright. But we ought to be able to dialogue about it and to share the differences and to still be okay, to still have relationship, to still look at the world and our country and say you know there’s lots of things that need to be fixed. And we may think differently about how to go about that but if we are Christians and if we are caring and loving towards one another, if we’re looking for justice and mercy, we can find a way! We can find a way to move forward together. We can

find a way as a church. We can find a way as a country. We can find a way as a world to find peace. And we have to work towards that as individuals, as a collective, as a church, as a country, as a world to try to find that path which leads us to put away the weapons. Not because of controls but because there is not the fear that says I need something to protect myself or to attack the other. It's time for us to resolve to live as though we are fellow citizens of the kingdom of God and to help one another when there's need. When people are hungry, when people are thirsty, when people are lost and need to find a place to call their own. To clothe the naked, to feed the hungry, to visit those who are in prison, to help them to find a new way, a better way of being the person that God sees in them.

And a lot of that has to do with how we are relating to one another. To family, to friends, to the stranger who comes into our life. To have moments of acceptance, have moments of sharing a faith and of peace and a promise of God. It is time for us to resolve, to move forward in our being citizens of the kingdom of God. To lay aside some of those fears that have built up in us. To lay aside some of the anger that has built up in us over the last year or so. And to find a way to speak to one another civilly. To care for one another regardless of the color of our skin, our nationality or our religion. It's time for us to resolve, to see one another as God sees us. As worthy of giving his son, as worthy of unconditional love, as worthy to be called his children and to live in God's creation as stewards and as children of God. We each will find our own way of doing these things, we each come from a different place, we each come from a different understanding. And yet we have found ourselves together here. Let us resolve to work together to find peace among us. Let us resolve to lay aside the fear. Look for the positives that are around us and hold those up as hope, as promise in moving forward in the next year, in the next decade, in the next century. For the world is given by God, the direction it takes depends upon us and our willingness to be kind, our willingness to share the abundance that we have been given, the willingness to share who we are with one another. Not out of fear, not out of anger but out of the love of God.