

1 Advent – Year C –December 2, 2009 - Homily
Jeremiah 33:14-16; Psalm 25:1-9; 1 Thessalonians 3:9-13; Luke 21:25-36
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Every couple that becomes a parent can tell us that the first pregnancy is the one where they read all the books, take the Lamaze classes religiously, eat all the right foods, plug in the “baby Mozart” for at least an hour a day, and follow every stage of the baby’s development with eager anticipation. After the baby is born, they will have at least a hundred photos by the end of the first week of their new son or daughter’s life. By the time the second baby is on the way, most parents don’t have the time or energy for most of the above. And even after the second or third baby is born there are probably about one third of the photos. The parents have also learned that the ten second rule is probably okay for that dropped cookie, and that being licked by the dog is not going to cause serious or terminal illness in most toddlers. The fledgling community of faith at Thessalonica is like Paul’s first child, and he exhibits all the signs of an anxious parent concerned for every detail and every step in their spiritual journey.

A little background might help us here. For much of Paul’s ministry he was quite convinced that the *Parousia* or second coming of Christ was imminent. As time went on, and Jesus did not appear, adjustments had to be made in instructing communities about how to live a faithful life in these in-between times. You and I are still living in that tension and time of anticipation, where some days we feel confident and ready for Christ’s return, praying, “Come, Lord Jesus, come”. Then there are the other days, when we are praying fervently that we will be granted the gift of time to make right something that we regret before Jesus gathers us up to Himself. It is quite understandable then that there was some confusion on the part of the Thessalonians, and that Paul desired earnestly to visit the community and continue his work of ministry amongst them.

In many ways, all these years later, we have lost some of that early zeal for Christ’s return, and we may well have become a little too relaxed in our preparedness. We have, for the most part accepted that the end of the world is probably not going to be today or tomorrow or even in our lifetime. Yet, when we think about it, isn’t that just our presumptuous attitude coming out? The Scriptures tell us that even Jesus is not privileged to know when that day or hour will be. Beyond that, even though none of us generally acknowledges such a deep dependence on God, we do, in fact, live and breathe by the grace of God. Equally, we can each find ourselves in God’s closer presence at any moment. There is a least a little irony here as well. We can see and even applaud the efforts of every store across the county for being one hundred percent ready for Christmas way ahead of time. On the other hand, what do you think the world would look like if all Christians were as diligent in our spiritual preparations for Christ’s coming? The secular world seems to mirror Paul’s own spiritual preparedness. Paul comes before God daily to give thanks for the Thessalonians, and prays “night and day” to see them. So where does that leave you and me?

As the early church learned, and as we have come to know, this season of Advent pulls and prods us from both the past and the future, even as we are living in the turmoil of the present. Paul begins his message to the Thessalonians with praise at the joy they bring in their faith and faithfulness to the Lord. Advent is our New Year, our beginning if you like. Just like the world does at the end of the calendar year, we too can look back and celebrate our

faithfulness to God's mission here at The Church of Our Saviour. At our recent vestry and officer's mutual ministry review, we did just that, and I think it's important that we recall some of our wonderful gifts this evening. To that end, I'd like to invite you all to share your own personal favorite events, ministries, or stories of what brought you particular joy these last several months. To get us started I'll share some of the top three list from the vestry and officer's retreat: Vacation Bible School was a big hit; the dinners for eight; and our outreach program, including the annual rummage sale. How about you? What has brought you great joy in the ministries of this place over the past year? [.....] We do good work together huh! In the same way, we also look back and feel the joy of preparing to celebrate Christ's birth. It is truly an awesome time, where we move the furniture of our hearts around to make sure that the manger is front and center, full of fresh, sweet smelling hay, with swaddling clothes laid out and ready to welcome God incarnate. This is one aspect of the cleaning up and rearranging that is so vital to our Advent preparations.

At the other end of the Advent tug-of-war, we feel the pull in our anticipation of Jesus' second coming, and turn our eyes to the future. Paul also has something to say about what we are called to during the waiting period. As he says to the Thessalonians, "And may the Lord make you increase and abound in love for one another and for all.... And may he so strengthen your hearts in holiness that you may be blameless before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all his saints." This is where we might start to feel that sliver of fear running right alongside our excitement. Do we love one another and others well, could we do better in that? Do we live holy lives, and are we holy? Can we honestly say that we are blameless before God? Well there is good news for all of us who are squirming a little now. Our faith in Christ has made us well, we stand before God clothed in His righteousness, and the Holy Spirit is constantly working to effect our transformation into Christ-likeness. Nonetheless, Advent is an opportunity to recommit to living intentionally towards the good, the just, and the true, as co-creators with God and our Lord Jesus Christ. This season of Advent reminds us that in Christ, we can and do experience the restoration of "whatever is lacking in our faith."

Even better, with just the smallest measure of faith in Christ, we can confidently set aside our fear, because in His perfect love and sacrifice we have already been judged, forgiven for our sins, and blessed with God's gift of hope in our salvation. This is what we know as our freedom in Christ. It is also the joy of the Gospel message we bear to an ambivalent world. This season is our new beginning, an invitation to be as diligent as a first time parent is, or as industrious as a storeowner in our own planning and arranging. Let us pray that every day, we will have the courage to say, "Come, Lord Jesus, come!"

Amen.