

SPG#221, ADVENT 1C
Rev. Charles Pope
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Jeremiah 33:14-16

1 Thessalonians 3:9-13

Luke 21:25-36

A few weeks ago our Deacon preached a sermon on the talk around the movie entitled “2012.” Mark referred to the hype around the movie that has to do with doomsday and the end of civilization as we know it. At the end of his sermon he encouraged us to look beyond doomsday predictions to a faith based hope. And I hope that his sermon and mine today communicate that our clergy are not afraid to tackle some of the more nerve wracking issues of today from the pulpit. I could say that his sermon was so provocative that it inspired me to preach on the same thing. And it was a good sermon. And it was timely. For the 2012 talk will continue, and particularly as we get closer to the year.

However, the truth is that in today’s gospel we find these words, **There will be signs in the sun, the moon, and the stars, and on the earth distress among nations confused by the roaring of the sea and the waves. People will faint from fear and foreboding of what is coming upon the world, for the powers of the heavens will be shaken.**

We find similar words in Mark 13. And for sure we will find such language in the apocalyptic literature in the book of Daniel and in Revelation.

So Christians are no strangers to finding such words in the scripture. And because we have found such language in faith based literature for thousands of years, it would seem that religious people would have something insightful to say about such talk when it emerges in a movie such as “2012.”

To be fair, there is consensus among many scholars that such writing in the gospels is based on the writers' witness of the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD.

And some scholars say that the destruction by the Roman army was so devastating, that it seemed like the end of the world, and was portrayed as such. In the gospels the warnings of the end times come just prior to the portrayal of the second coming of Jesus Christ.

And again some scholars say the references to massive natural changes is a way of saying that the coming of Christ is not limited to the walls of the Church. Rather the coming of Christ is on a global and even cosmic scale.

Wherever one comes down with the words about cataclysmic changes, I think we would be of some consensus that in these times of climate and global change that these words are compelling in a way that they were not even five years ago.

A lot of the 2012 talk has to do with a calendar called the "Long Count" which was produced by the ancient Mayan people of Central America. The calendar, unlike our shorter calendars, spans thousands of years. It runs out on the date of December 21, 2012. In addition, and mostly not referred to by the media, found in the ancient Chinese "Book of Changes," the "I Ching," is a symbolic reference to the year 2012 as being of utmost importance. In a PBS documentary some months ago, along with references to the Mayan calendar and to the "I Ching," reference was made to a computer program that has the simple and unending function of reading the whole internet. The program consistently has drawn inferences and conclusions that point to the year 2012.

For me, all of this raises two large questions that I present for all of us to consider.

First, the obvious question – In view of polar icecaps melting, rising sea levels, and other phenomena, are we looking at a massive transformation in our planet?

And how close are movies like “2012” to the truth when they portray the destruction of life as we know it?

Second, in view of the emission of greenhouse gases, and in view of undeniable global climate change, are we to assume that our poor stewardship of the environment has brought on calamity? Or would our science allow that we are witnessing the dynamics and cycles of a larger planetary science of which we know relatively little?

Or perhaps could it be a combination of both a larger planetary science and poor stewardship?

So you can see how the scriptural words of Advent that have to do with cataclysmic and massive natural changes would have more meaning in these days as opposed to not very long ago. But, as it is, these words of Advent do not stop with talk of cataclysmic change. For in both Mark and Luke the changes are presented as heralding the coming of our Lord. Since his life in the flesh ended 2,000 years ago, Christians have hoped for his coming again, within the events and encounters of our own lives. And perhaps now, with global change, we wonder about his coming within the life of earth.

And so Advent, this year, as in other years, and yet totally different, is about waiting and anticipation. So much of what is written in the New Testament has to do with waiting and anticipation. Waiting for the Messiah over hundreds of years. John the Baptizer proclaiming the imminent arrival of the Savior.

Jesus anticipating over and over again his crucifixion and resurrection. And now with global changes, we wait to see what is next.

Waiting in the Christian life is absolutely crucial. And Advent is our first chance in the Church year to assess our own waiting, our own watchfulness, our own awareness, our own preparation, our own readiness. I think it would be fair to say that Christians in this Advent should not be like the ostrich with our heads in the wrong place. And the wrong place would be just being anxious and terrified. Rather in our lives of faith, in our being informed, we should face the days with love, with knowledge, with wisdom, and courage. For the coming of our Lord in a life or in a world is beyond all fear, beyond all adversity.

Why should we hope with love, knowledge, wisdom, and courage? Because it is our call. It is our vocation as Christians. Because we need each other to be that way. Because the world needs us to be that way.

What is the significance of hoping, of waiting, of anticipation? What is the significance of a whole church that hopes for a place beyond all adversity, all possible calamity? What is the significance of a whole church that hopes for peace in the world, that hopes for love among her members? What is the significance of your own hoping? Of your own anticipation?

For all of us and for each of us, it will be about day to day life in events and encounters. But this year it could also be about huge and frightening things. It requires that we give ourselves to the mystery of God and how he acts in the world and in the life of one person.

And so, I ask you, are you ready for this? Are you open in heart and mind to accommodate the extraordinary images of Advent 2009?

If your answer to all of these is "yes," or even if it is "I am working on it," then I invite you into a holy and dynamic Advent. I invite you to get ready for God who becomes human. I invite you to know the true meaning of the birth of Jesus Christ. I invite you to hear God speaking uniquely to you in your heart. I invite you to open your life more to the astonishing, the frightening, the loving presence of God.

Herbert O'Driscoll, in his book, A Year of the Lord, invites us to make our lives in Advent into an empty manger, a manger that is being prepared for a Child. That means that in the center of your life, in the part that is most truly you, in the safest and warmest part of you, you are lovingly preparing that place for the Baby.

If you respond to that invitation to make your life into a manger, then you will be ready to hear about mountainous spiritual realities, about signs of the sun and the moon and the stars, about the end of the world and the beginning of the new.

We will be ready to hear, and we will not be terrified. For even in our getting ready to receive him we will know that he is with us.

Even in our uncertainties, our preparations, our examination, our questioning he is with us. The anticipation and expectation of Advent is not something that is separate from the rest of life. Because in our lives we wonder about many things.

We wonder what it will be like to retire. We wonder about what it will feel like to fall in love. We wonder what it will be like to have a child. We wonder what it will feel like to die. We wonder what it will be like to have enough money to pay all the bills. We wonder what it will be like to graduate from high school or college. Whatever it is that we wonder about, or wait for, or expect, the message of Advent is that God is with us in the waiting. And that he is with us at the end. Luke, in today's gospel goes to great lengths to say this. He in essence says, "Even if we wait in the midst of devastation we will find God waiting with us. And when we are done waiting we will find him there too."

And so the questions of Advent have to do with both. During Advent 2009 what are you waiting for in your life? What are the anticipations of your life? As you wait, and as you expect, beyond being comfortable and insisting on convenience, would you make more room for him in your life? If that is the case, then how would you make more room for him? How would your life be different?

Don't be afraid to make this Advent different than all the rest. Don't be afraid to let him in as never before. Let the manger be inside. Amen.