

I LOVE ADVENT
Sermon for Advent 1C- Lk 21:25-36
LPC, 11/29/15

I begin this sermon with some personal testimony. It's Advent. I love Advent. I love Advent because Advent means that Jesus is coming, and I love Jesus.

I can imagine some Episcopalians being uncomfortable with statements like "I love Jesus." Here is what I mean when I say that. I love what Jesus represents. Jesus represents God with us, among us. Here and now. I love this.

God among us here and now means that the kingdom of God is as close as a heartbeat. The kingdom of God is where people are loved, forgiven, healed and provided for. I love the kingdom of God. I love the kingdom of God because I *need* the kingdom of God. Without the kingdom of God at the edge of my consciousness, sometimes this world would literally become too much for me to bear.

The kingdom of God in my mind is synonymous with heaven. Notice that this means that my definition of heaven is not some personalized paradise... where everything is perfect for Cynthia. Heaven, the kingdom of God, is not just where Cynthia is loved, forgiven, healed and provided for. Heaven has got to be where everyone is loved, forgiven, healed and provided for. If I am loved, forgiven, healed and provided for and someone else isn't, my hold on happiness is precarious.

This isn't just because of some touchy-feely fellow feeling: "Peace! Love!" This is based on some cold, hard, observation of human nature. When some people have love, forgiveness, healing and provision, and other people do not, something tends to happen among human beings. The Have-nots become rebellious and the Haves become defensive and suspicious. This unhealthy mix tends to erupt into violence. Thus begins a cycle of retaliation that keeps everyone from recognizing that they have anything of worth at all.

The solution to this mess is both demonstrated and taught by the historical Jesus, who not only himself loves, forgives, heals and provides indiscriminately, but teaches his followers to love, forgive, heal and provide for each other, including our enemies: "Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you."

The Friends of St. Lawrence last Sunday discussed how hard this is, to love everybody. One of the ideas we are exploring is just what love means. In our culture we associate love with a warm or romantic feeling, and of course we can't feel that way for everybody. But Jesus does challenge us to follow his own example of love, which is caring. Jesus demonstrates care by forgiving, healing and providing for. Jesus demonstrates a non-reactive, non-retaliatory stance, even when people attack him personally.

The Jesus stance is one that most of us can only aspire to, given the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune, and the general nastiness that seems to pervade humankind. But it is important to aspire to this stance. I will never attain the Jesus stance, but I must believe in it to live. That's why I need the kingdom of God. That's why I love the kingdom of God.

I was about to say that I love the kingdom of God with all my heart, but if that were true I would serve the kingdom of God with all my heart and I don't. But for life to have any meaning for me, the kingdom of God must exist as an ideal for which I aspire.

In the Gospel of Luke, Jesus describes his own coming in the context of the apocalypse: the end of the world as we know it, when there will be signs in the sun, the moon and the stars, distress and confusion among the nations, the roaring of sea and waves. People will faint from fear and even heaven will appear shaken.

If you read Facebook and a lot of news commentary you would think this is going on now. Political scientists tell us the American way of life is being threatened. Seismologists tell us a major earthquake is imminent. Meteorologists say cataclysmic weather is in the offing. Every day there's another terrorist report or school shooting. There is even, we are told, a war on Christmas.

People in Luke's day took Jesus' predictions more literally than we do today, imagining the end of the world to be imminent. But in a way the current cultural climate is just as fraught, if not more so, than it was for those who expected the literal coming of Jesus any day.

Thus, Jesus' teaching in that ancient context has particular relevance for us today. What does he say? "Stand up and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near."

In the midst of a cultural climate that tells us that civilization is going to hell in a hand basket, we followers of Jesus need to stand up and raise our heads, confident that our redemption is near. Our redemption is near because Jesus has come and will come again.

Jesus has come, which means that God is among us. If God is among us, God's kingdom is as close as a heartbeat. The place where we are loved, forgiven, healed and provided for is here. The place where everyone is loved, forgiven, healed and provided for is real, and we are invited to live there now. We don't have to die first. We don't have to wait for Jesus to come on a cloud, though we continue to look to that ultimate triumph of goodness, in order to place our current sufferings in the context of hope.

God's promise is real, and reliable. Heaven and earth may pass away but God's promise in Jesus will not pass away. Therefore, stand up and raise your heads. Do not be weighed down with dissipation and drunkenness and *worries*. Pray. Be alert to the nearness of the kingdom, and work with it. Advent is here. Jesus is coming. I love Advent!