

## ADVENT ONE, YEAR B, NOVEMBER 29, 2020

Today marks the beginning of Advent a time that we are asked to wait, prepare and stay alert. It is a season of preparation for Christmas that does not involve decorating or buying presents. Rather it is a time to clean out our hearts, mind and souls to receive Christ.

Advent is also a season that marks the beginning of the church year with very ominous warnings. These texts are described as apocalyptic ones or the end of time. Popular culture and numerous movies has taught us to equate "apocalypse" with ruination, destruction, hell fire and brimstone. Armageddon, I am Legend, The Day After and every Zombie movie all depicts a horrendous end to civilization as we know it. But that's not what the word apocalypse was originally meant to convey. It originally meant clarification, edification or to uncover.

So what is it that we are meant to uncover or clarify? Given all the turmoil we have lived through the past nine months we have all become very weary, anxious and worried and we leery about uncovering anything.. But what we have to remember is challenge, upheaval, and disruption are not new to our human experience.

In the passages read today, the upheaval is described as painful but isn't it true that out of pain comes new life. The intent of these lessons is not to prepare us for the end of the world, but "to bring hope to desperate people and to focus expectations on the revelation of God in the here and now." That is what we are to uncover.

We are called to a specific kind of alertness to what is right in front of us. We need to look at the work we can do in our own spaces. When we think of Advent in that way we realize we have to prepare our hearts as a welcome place for God. So, the first thing we should do, inasmuch as this is the beginning of a new year, is to recognize Advent as an opportunity to start over. We should ask ourselves what have I left undone? In our souls is there something that still longs to be completed? Is there something in our lives that longs for our attention?

I think that if we examine our lives we discover that underneath all our most heartfelt desires there is a yearning for a new beginning. The new reality that was central in Christ's life and teaching says the Kingdom of God breaks in on us at any time. Each time it breaks through to us, it is a new beginning.

The author Andrew Greely wrote in one of his reflections: "prepare for the kingdom of God whenever it explodes into your life. In Jesus' view of the kingdom, it is always near, ready to break through the barriers of every day and seize us, impel us, embrace us, challenge us - and especially in Jesus' view of things the kingdom appears with God's sweeping love in ordinary daily events: a confused child, a sick friend, a discouraged spouse, a troublesome person on the phone, a demand that seems unfair but where we can do much good with little effort. These are the places to look for God's loving power.

Advent is a time to look for, anticipate and expect new beginnings. What will it be for you? Where will you discover the Christ breaking into your life? Edwin Markham in his poem "How the Great Guest Came" tells a story of Conrad the cobbler who had dreamed that the Lord was coming to visit him. So he washed the walls of his small shop and his shelves until they fairly shone, then decorated with branches of holly and fir. On his table he put out milk and honey and bread, his best, and sat down to wait for his guest, thinking how kindly he would treat him when he came.

Outside in the street. Conrad saw a poor barefoot beggar walking in the rain. He felt sorry for the man and called him in and gave him a pair of shoes. Then he saw an old lady who was bent over as she carried a heavy load of firewood. He gave her some food and helped her on her way. Then to his door came a little child, lost and afraid in the world. He gave the child the milk in the waiting cup and led the child home to its mother's arms.

Now it was evening, and the old shoemaker still waited. Had the Lord forgotten to come? he wondered sadly. Then in the silence he heard a soft voice: "Lift up your heart, for I kept my word. Three times I came to your friendly door; Three times my shadow was on Your floor. I was the beggar with bruised feet, I was the woman you gave to eat; I was the child on the homeless street.' "

The poem reminds us that if we are to meet God this Advent season it will be in the needs of the world. It will be in the needs and struggles of those who are closest to us. It could even be in the tragedies of our own lives, in our broken dreams as we discover new dreams and renewed vision.

Advent gives us the opportunity to start over again, to pick up the pieces and pick ourselves up. So what can you do to have a new beginning? How about mend a quarrel. Seek out a forgotten friend. Dismiss suspicion. Write a long overdue note. Hug someone tightly and whisper, "I love you " or do a virtual hug. Forgive an enemy. Be gentle and patient with an angry person. Express appreciation. Gladden the heart of a child. Find the time to keep a promise. Make or bake something for someone else---anonymously. Release a grudge. Maybe listen, for a change. Speak kindly to a stranger. Enter into another's sorrow. Smile. Laugh a little. Laugh a little more. Take a walk with a friend. Kneel down and pet a dog. Read a poem or two to your mate or friend. Lessen your demands on others. Play some beautiful music during the evening meal. Apologize if you were wrong. Turn off the TV and electronic devices and talk. Treat someone to an ice-cream cone. Do the dishes for the family. Pray for someone who helped you when you hurt. Fix breakfast on Saturday morning. Give a gentle answer even though you feel strongly. Encourage someone you know is struggling. Point out one thing you appreciate most about someone with whom you live or work.

These are just a few suggestions and we have four weeks to do even more. During the next four weeks as we prepare for Christ's coming we ought to look into our hearts and see what we need to get rid of so that there is room for Christ in them to make a new beginning.

Today marks a new beginning for each of us. Watch for Christ to break into our lives yet again and give us a fresh opportunity to look at our lives and deepen our relationship with God. This Advent prepare your homes, your lives and your hearts for the coming of the Christ child that will change you in ways you can't even imagine. So give Advent your best and fullest attention and you will find there is a lot to uncover. That's a promise. Amen.