

December 6, 2009  
Advent II  
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St James Episcopal Church

As we were sorting books yesterday for the book and media sale, Janet Fisher ran into a real doozie. The title is “Will Christ Return by 1988? 101 Reasons Why”. This book had been filed away with the Non-Fiction books, probably related to the religion and spirituality table.

A great laugh went up and someone asked for the date of publication, which was 1979. Needless to say, the book was going into the trash. And then I dug it out of the trash a couple of hours later.

I looked through this book, however, to see what gloom and doom was predicted within its covers. It was the usual stuff, bad weather, earthquakes, the population boom, the redefinition of what sodomy is and who is engaging in it, myriad financial crises, signs and wonders in the heavens. I think back in history and wonder how many of these signs have been with us always and how the end-of-the-world prophets have given us dates that have come and gone.

What the title of the book brought forward for me is that no matter how long I contemplate the goodness of God, the majesty of God, the justice of God and the creativity of God, I can't even approach the level of saying my A B C's about God, even yet. I can't presume to know how God is working in the world in the greater scheme of things. And what I can't project for myself is how God will work in my life, under my skin, in my head and heart, to create a new thing, which is ME.

In the liturgy of Advent we hear about who was and is and is to come. We call that the mystery of faith, Christ has died, Christ is risen, Christ will come again.

But equally amazing, to me, is how that mystery gets manifested in my life. I am one of the blessed who has changed. I was and I am and I am yet to come, not as the redeemer but as one of the redeemed. Not all of who I am is realized. I have not arrived. I'm different than when I was 20 years ago or 30 years ago, thanks be to God. Some of that is simply growing up. And some of it I attribute to growth in faith.

The little book and its prophecy about the return of Jesus Christ to reign in glory will be published again and as David has mentioned, there are movies in theaters today that take on the same theme. Those themes are cyclical, just like the church year. They have been written before, they are published today, and new ones will come out in the course of time. They were, they are, and they are forthcoming.

I can't predict the end of time. I don't even know the date and time of something more personal, my own death. And I think about it more as I am aging, but much of my life before that death is still before me, making me more aware of seasons, times, changes and growth.

I can understand proclaiming the Gospel of Advent-tide every year with the expectation that I will be changed again this year. There will be expectation, realization, manifestation, crucifixion, resurrection, education and new growth. These are the themes of the church year AND they are the events of my own life, seen through Christian-tinted glasses.

The Gospel lesson for today is grounded in right now and not yet. With the collection of names and places so carefully set before us, to set a time and place and setting to the story, the rest of the Gospel is part of the not-yet of faith. Living with the not-yet faith takes a good amount of courage, knowing an expanse of time stretches out in front of us. We want to know WHY? in the midst of pain, sorrow and loss. We want to know

WHEN? in the days when we call for help and wait for its arrival. We ponder the HOW? when we're facing adversity and can't see our way out of it.

We are told the day will come when these questions will be answered and a culmination of time and history, as we know it and experience it, will see a complete turn-around and change on a level we can hardly imagine. But I can't answer how that will happen. I don't know when it will happen.

What I do know is God is working in me and sometimes, when I let go a little bit, God works through me to further the Kingdom.

In the meantime, I will anticipate all of the seasons of the church year and all the readings we share in community, hearing their promises anew that God is working in us and through us as voices crying in the wilderness, "Prepare the way of the Lord."