

December 4, 2011

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Second Sunday of Advent, Year B St. Christopher's Episcopal Church

My friend Peter Sawtell in his weekly blog post talked about Matthew's recounting of the magi visiting with Herod. As a result of the stars, they were drawn to Jerusalem to ask Herod about the new king. He could not read the stars, so asked advisors to fill him in. In our Bible Study this week, we were discussing Jesus' run-in with the Pharisees and Sadducees in chapter 16 of Matthew's gospel. Jesus chides them for being able to read the signs of the daily sky to predict weather, but unable to understand the significance of the 'signs of the times'.

Jesus could as easily have been talking about and to us. We know we are in Advent, universally held up as the season of waiting—waiting for the Christ child's birth, surely. But we are to be waiting equally or more for the return of that crucified and risen Christ. We know all this because we do it every year. No surprises. It's drilled into our heads. And we respond with the same expectant "oohs" and "aahs" every year as this rapid season scurries around the corner and out the door.

Half the battle is remembering to be expectant and anticipatory in a world that moves at supersonic speed. And the other half is knowing what we are to do with Advent once we catch it. So, here we are, a quarter way into this season. What have we done with it? How have we been different?

Second Peter really vigorously holds up the mirror of Advent. Reminding us that God's time is non-linear and breath-taking, he calls us up short, "...the day of the Lord will come like a thief. And then the heavens will pass away with a loud noise, and the elements will be dissolved with fire, and the earth and everything that is done on it will be disclosed."

Maybe our human sensibilities have trouble believing this with all our hearts and minds because the world hasn't ended. We want to say to the writer of these letters of Peter—really? It's been two thousand years; should we still wait?

We know that the world had changed significantly by the time 2 Peter was written. Coming as late as 160CE, this is the first piece of scripture to look on another part of the New Testament as finished and affirmed Scripture. They were living the warnings spoken of earlier. If we are to take any warning seriously, we might start with believing them. And, as they say, seeing is believing.

Given that, if we believe we should comport ourselves differently, we rightly ask, "How?" This is addressed in the second half of this short lesson—"...what sort of persons ought you to be in leading lives of holiness and godliness, waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God...?" How do we wait?

When I was a child, I attended the Southern Baptist church until I knew differently. Our worship was one of singing, reading scripture, listening to the message, and responding. But I never remember saying the Nicene Creed. Upon joining the Episcopal Church and saying it every week we celebrate Holy Eucharist, I have really rubbed my face in it. I have made that creed my own. I love to imagine God the Creator of the earth—of ALL that is, seen and unseen. I love to consider Jesus as consubstantial with the Father—of one being—God from God, Light from Light.

But lately, the part that just echoes and echoes for me is:
he suffered death and was buried.
On the third day he rose again
in accordance with the Scriptures;
he ascended into heaven..."

My emphasis has moved to an entirely different syllable. Pain and grief has pushed me to find comfort in new facets of the same glistening beam of light. I am so excited about the prospect of heaven. It was there all the time, but I was focused on other aspects of the same reality.

How are we to wait? Not by dragging our current faith to the edge of the cliff like an old car and pushing it over; but by gently taking the time to unpack the reality in which we currently find ourselves. And by inviting new perspectives.

Social media including Facebook, Twitter, and the rest allow us to be public to anyone all the time about every aspect of our lives. But it does not make us more authentic. We can be reached through email, portable

phones, cell phones, and satellite phones almost anywhere in our world at any hour of the day or night, but these extraordinary devices do not call us to be effective communicators, or to deeply examine the human need to share who and what we are.

Muzak in the malls, the hum of our appliances, the endless drone of TVs, radios or stereos, screens shouting at us while we pump gas or walk through the card section, and powerful jet airplanes crackly overhead most hours of the day, but they do not aid in our discernment of what is worth listening to. Worse yet, they drown out the lithe squirrel lightly tapping from one branch to another on her way back to the nest.

Political speech after political speech are slowly whittled into professional sound bites. Yet they do not clarify why the greatest country in the world has trouble agreeing on any public policy.

Many of our public systems are broken or badly bent, not because we are bad people, but because we have the em-**PHA**-sis on the wrong sy-**LA**-ble. In the Church, and in our lives, we overlook Advent because we so desperately want to get to Christmas—when miracles happen, saviors appear, the poor get the just rewards, and the Good News is apparent to even the stranger and the lowly.

The author of 2 Peter says, “while you are waiting for these things, strive to be found by him at peace, without spot or blemish...” We might ask ourselves, what does it mean to be at peace? What would it take for us to be people of peace? How do we take in righteousness and make it our own—here and now?

Advent invites us:

Put down the phone, turn off the electronics, shut the door to external chaos shoe-horning itself into your psyche. Your cup, and mine, are so full it's hard to find a spot for even one more speck of sand, much less the pleas of the hungry and homeless. Stop considering yourself as indispensable, needing to be available all the time to everyone. Allow yourself to be available to God just this one day. Allow everyday miracles to find their way into your heart. Allow yourself to be moved by the cries for mercy by fellow beings. Listen to the snowfall.

Imagine that God was serious and truthful that Jesus will come again, and mull for yourself what it might look like if you were actually eager

for that. Who will you tell Jesus you have been? Listen to his questions about the gift that has been your life. Listen.

Listen. For his day will come. And it could be today.