



ST. ANDREW'S IN THE PINES EPISCOPAL CHURCH

SERMON
Advent 1
11-28-10

Have any of you ever had the experience of people who are Jehovah's Witnesses coming to your door to give you a copy of their publication The Watchtower and to ask you if you are ready? Are you awake? Will you be one of the 144,000 who are welcomed into heaven? Has that happened to you? It has been awhile for me but I still remember their visits. Their witness and ways would fit in well with today's readings, but did you ever think that they were ---well--- peculiar people?

If you did, according to Chicago theologian Rodney Clapp – that's just how it should be. If you are a follower of Christ – your life should be peculiar to those around you. He's even written a book called "Peculiar People." Clapp maintains that as a Christian we live in a place separate from our cultural/societal norms. We can be nothing less than – peculiar. We commit ourselves to living with eyes and hearts that are tuned into a world of faith, a world of the spirit, a world of hope and love. We see the world through different eyes, we find ourselves nudged to live with a courage that is willing to walk a different pathway, even if our friends and family don't follow us.

This season in our church is an example of a time when we have the opportunity to live as peculiar people. We are Advent people. Advent people focus on waiting, on preparation, on joyous anticipation. I feel great appreciation of the identity of being people of Advent. I think our emphasis on advent is rather unique to our denomination. It feels good to take this month slowly. We take four weeks for reflection, for expectation, for anticipation of a glorious celebration that is not yet here. We are not there yet – neither to the birth of Christ or the second coming. We are in a time of being called, of being prepared.

Our Episcopal tradition of Advent can help form us to stand apart as peculiar people and it can benefit us spiritually to slow down and change our focus during this season. But there is more than that to living as a peculiar person – as a follower of Christ. We have moments in every day to stand out as peculiar. And we don't even have to go door to door to have opportunities appear.

Paul, in the readings from Romans tells us that we know what time it is – now is the moment for us to wake from sleep. He uses the word Kairos for time – Kairos means the crucial moment – a moment in the present. In other words – right now matters. That is the message in the gospel

reading also. It is futile for us to guess the future – it is the present time that matters. The work we are doing right now in the field, in the home, in our daily habits. How we are living each day contains in it the seed of salvation. Two people side by side doing the same things – yet one is living with salvation. Each and everyone alive is unable to know the future – so each moment is the time of our living in the present as a disciple – as a peculiar person.

Are we awake and working? Have we put on the armor of light, living honorably, spending our days with words and decisions that bring peace?

Those are the questions for us today as we live in this in-between time. What are the moment by moment decisions we can make that mark us as peculiar? That bring us into the light of the Lord?

I read a wonderful story of an Anglican priest, Temple Gairdner, who was serving a church in Egypt. One day a sheik came up to him in public and began insulting and trying to shame Gairdner in front of others. Gairdner responded by putting his hands over his eyes for a moment and praying silently, and then spoke with great kindness to the sheik. Later the sheik said, “Till that moment I had not believed in your religion, but I believe in it now, because I say a highborn Englishman take an insult from me in silence. There must be something within him to cause that.” (“Pilgrims on Christ on the Muslim Road”, Paul-Gordon Chandler, pg. 133) It was an unexpected moment in the present that witnessed to the peculiarity that flowed in Temple Gairdner’s life.

That is the way it can be for all of us. For some it might be in the decision to buck a cultural trend and keep your mother in your home until the moment of her death. For another it might be a decision to not laugh at the racist joke told by a co-worker or to refuse to call others by demeaning slang terms. It might mean showing hospitality to someone others treat with disrespect. Or to always refuse to participate in violence. It might mean taking insults and responding with kindness. It might mean being people of Advent and not singing Christmas carols until it is Christmas! There so many decisions that can be made in the right now that prepare us for the time to come.

We will have to continue to live with the unknown ahead of us. The questions - How will Christ come among us again? How will we experience his birth in our lives at Christmas this year? How will he come at the end of the age? Are we ready? Will we miss it? Those echo the questions asked of me when the Jehovah Witnesses came to my door. And always my answer is – I will live in the present moment so yes, I will live my life so that I am always ready. It is living in the right now that keeps me awake. I have plenty of opportunities to be peculiar.

So let us all fling our arms and hearts wide open and say, Come Lord Jesus! We are ready.

Thanks be to God.