

First Sunday of Advent
November 27, 2011
Year B 2011
Deacon Carl J. Knapp

A most blessed New Year to you all. January first may be the beginning of the secular year, but the first Sunday of Advent is the beginning of the Christian year. Thus the proper greeting – A most blessed New Year to you all.

We humans tend to look at time in two ways. One is to consider that time moves in a circular manner. Reincarnation has a strong pull on the human mind. It can be comforting to think that we return – over and over- in a new form to this world and to life here. But have you ever noticed that persons who believe in reincarnation and remember past lives are always princes or princesses, kings or queens. Nobody was ever a slave knee deep in the mud of the Nile or a peasant digging potatoes in a bog in cold Germany. How popular and pervasive can be the feeling –I’ve been here before. Novelists creatively engage this idea that time goes round and round. When I was young there was a wonderful event, a person knew of her previous life in Dublin. She knew the songs of the working people and the events that took place fifty years before her birth. She appeared on early TV and was a sensation. She was living proof of the existence of reincarnation. Until someone researching her background discovered that as a very young child she had had an Irish Immigrant Nanny from Dublin. All of her alleged previous life experiences she had learned from this Nanny.

The other approach is to view time as moving in a straight line. There is a beginning and an end. This is the biblical concept - Creation moving toward the new creation. We began our worship this morning with the collect, ...”now in the time of this mortal life in which your Son Jesus Christ came to visit us in great humility; that in the last day, when he shall come again in his glorious majesty...”

There is a beginning – He came to visit us.

There is an end – He shall come again.

Our story –our beliefs - starts with the interaction of God – the Creator. ‘In the beginning God...’ Our sacred writings begin with the recording of the first people called by God to witness, to the world, God’s purposes for creation.

The reading from the prophet Isaiah needs some introduction. This is the last of the three prophets we call Isaiah. These chapters from 55 to 66 are more than 200 years later than the original Prophet Isaiah. The people have returned from the exile in Babylon and yet they continue to fall away from the Lord. Here we find witness to the power of God and the Lord’s continuing love for the Chosen People, however far they had strayed from God’s calling. Yet even as they had strayed; yet, they had not strayed so far that they had lost their memory of the Lord. In that first reading we hear the cry:

O That you would tear open the heavens and come down...From ages past no one has heard, no ear has perceived, no eye has seen any God besides you, who works for those who wait for him... Do not be exceedingly angry, O Lord, and do not remember iniquity forever.

Today’s psalm echoes the cry of a people in trouble; yet, who have a confident expression of faith in the faithfulness of the Lord. Hear, O Shepherd of Israel...stir up your strength and come to help us. Restore us, O God of hosts; show the light of your countenance and we shall be saved.

And then the Gospel announces that the Lord who has come will come again. This thirteenth chapter of Mark is a little apocalypse. A writing of the Last Days - like the writings of Ezekiel or a portion of the Book of Daniel. The God who acted in the creation of the world, who acted in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus the Messiah, will act to bring creation to its completion.

It is all too easy for us to come to terms with the world – to settle for what is as opposed to what is meant to be.

Robert Kennedy used the words of the Prophet Joel to beautifully express this:

I will pour out my spirit on all flesh: your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, and your young men shall see visions.

In the cities and campuses of every major city in this nation today; there are those who are acting out and fulfilling the words of the prophet Joel.

These readings for this First Sunday of Advent remind us of what the ancient Scriptures never forgot. There is a Creator who is the master of the universe and who has left a certain way for us to live. This world belongs to the Lord. Again from the Prophet Isaiah: ‘Yet, O Lord, you are our Father; we are the clay, and you are our potter; we are all the work of your hand.’ These words refer not simply to how God may have brought us into being in the first place, but rather to His constant, intimate and loving relation to us right now. We are only the caretakers. We have been placed in charge to maintain – not to destroy. The entire biblical story is a record of God’s choosing a people to be the stewards – the caretakers – who will carefully maintain that creation for the benefit of all of God’s creatures as expressed so powerfully in last week’s Gospel reading and the sermon.

The biblical doctrine of creation always seems to come back to this. God created this universe long ago, but the Lord is also our creator now, and so we turn to Him in awe, in trust, and ultimately, in love.

The concept of time as a straight line moving from a beginning to an end, the biblical concept, calls us to take every day, every hour, every moment, seriously. Carpe Diem – Seize the Day. We shall not pass this way again.