

The Color Purple

Isaiah 2:1-5; Psalm 122; Romans 13:11-14; Matthew 24:36-44

Good morning to all of you this first Sunday in Advent, as our colors change from green to purple: purple for the royalty of Christ, purple for the bruises inflicted upon Jesus!

Now, many people think of advent as simply that time to prepare again to celebrate the birth of Jesus, God with us, that advent is all about Christmas.

So once again we haul Christmas decorations out of storage, trees are cut down and decorated, and of course the manic shopping season of our ultra consumer society kicks into high gear.

We know this story so well, and when advent becomes merely the prelude to all of that, its very easy to fall into a kind of thinking that says, life and all of history is just a big, repeating circle, nothing really changes, it just goes around and around.

Or as one fellow puts it, the future is just like the present, only longer!

But that's not the message of advent.

The message of advent is "WAKE UP!!"

Wake up! to who you really are and to what you are called to become!!

Wake up! to the fact that God is even now creating this universe – and its destination is peace and reconciliation and kindness and justice.

Our destiny is Isaiah's vision of what this world looks like when God finally and at long last makes all things new, when:

"He shall judge between nations,
and arbitrate for many peoples;
they shall beat their swords into ploughshares,
and their spears into pruning-hooks;
nation shall not lift up sword against nation,
nor shall they learn war any more."

It is Paul's urgent letter to the Romans, that "now is the moment! ... wake up!..... salvation is near!; the night is far gone!, the day is near!"

That salvation is near, that God's dream for all of creation won't be defeated, is often hard to believe when we pick up the morning newspaper or find ourselves at odds with family or friends or fellow church members.

And that's why we have Advent — to step once again into the unwavering promise that God's good creation, and humanities key role in it, will not be undermined, not even by us, not even by us.

Raise your hand if you are baptized.

In your baptism, you died.

You died **into** Christ and **with** Christ.

Died to what you ask?

You died to the worship of things that are not God.

You died to the lie that says people are in charge, not God.

You died to the propaganda that says power and manipulation and money are where it's at and after all that dying then what??????

Well, that's the point of advent.

That's the point of the purple - this beautiful, bruised, royalty of God.

Advent is calling us to remember that the purpose of life is not about somehow muddling through with the hope of a better life in heaven after we die.

Advent announces with trumpets blaring that we, the Church, and every Christian we are the advance guard of God's kingdom here on earth.

And we carry out our work in the strangest way possible.

In a world that admires domination and power and fame, we come at the world's problems with vulnerability, with a willingness to absorb suffering, with a resolve to serve rather than seeking to be served.

It's an odd way to live.

It flies in the face of everything that comes naturally to me at least.

When I'm hit, my first reaction is to hit back.

Attack someone I love, get ready for me to come after you.

But precisely because those are my natural reactions is why you and I died in baptism.....

We died to those natural reactions so we could put on what at first seems the most unnatural thing possible: this new way of approaching life and each other that we get in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus.....

Purple – the color of that strange royalty of God that is willing to accept bruises....without retaliating.....without hating....

In Christ, there is a new world order:

"Blessed are the poor in spirit, theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed are those who mourn, they shall be comforted.

Blessed are the meek, they shall inherit the earth.

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, they shall be filled.

Blessed are the merciful, they shall obtain mercy.

Blessed are the pure in heart, they shall see God.

Blessed are the peacemakers, they shall be called children of God.

Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Or listen to the Pope's modern beatitudes:

"Blessed are those who remain faithful when evil is poured on them by others.

"Blessed are those who embrace the abandoned and marginalized.

"Blessed are those who see in every person the face of God.

"Blessed are those who safeguard our common home.

"Blessed are those who surrender their comfort in order to help others.

"Blessed are those who seek full communion between Christians."

Yes Advent is our wake up call, and these blessings, old and new, are the pathway to the life we are called to live, here, now, today!

To live in the advent of God is to "live a caught-up life, not a put-off life, so that wherever you are, you are ready for God.

Ours may be the generation that finally sees him ride in on the clouds, or, we may meet him as they have for generations past; one by one, as we each close our eyes for the last time." Taylor, *The Seeds of Heaven*.

Because our God is not safe or domesticated; because she comes breaking in when we least suspect, the Advent of God is also a time to be afraid.

Fear of God runs from the first pages of Scripture to the last.

Yes, it's true, fear God!

Because when you fear God alone, there is nothing else to fear.

Fear God, and you won't fear people, places or things.

Fear God alone, and you can stand with Moses at the burning bush; with Zechariah behind the curtain in the Temple; with Mary in the presence of the angel Gabriel, with the apostles trembling before the Risen Lord, and you too shall hear the words God says to all who fear him.

These words:

"Don't be afraid."

It is paradox.

It is riddle.

It is truth.

The fear of God abolishes the fear of God.

In C. S. Lewis' famous Narnia story, the children learn that the king of this strange far country, whose name is Aslan, is not a man, but a lion.

"Is he - quite safe?" little Susan asks.

"I shall feel rather nervous about meeting a lion!"

"That you will my dear," said Mrs. Beaver.

"If there's anyone who can appear before Aslan without his knees knocking, he's either braver than most, or quite silly."

"Then he isn't safe?" Lucy asks.

To which Mr. Beaver responds:

"Safe?!"

Don't you hear what Mrs. Beaver tells you?!

Who said anything about safe?!

Course he isn't safe!

But he's good I tell you!, he's good!"

This is Advent, and the color is purple.

Purple for bruises.

Purple for royalty.

Purple for hope.

It is, after all, the season of hope!

Hope that this life is not all there is.

Hope that at the appointed time, all pain, all distress, all baffled exasperation, will be taken up with all that is light and pure and funny and holy,, and made into something that only God can fashion.

So “come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob; that he may teach us his ways and that we may walk in his paths.”

This is the Advent of God.

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