

Advent I Year A

“But about that day or hour, no one knows”

There was an insightful article in the paper on Wednesday or Thursday written by Bill Finch about whether to eat seafood from the gulf this thanksgiving. He noted that there is more tonnage of seafood harvested from the gulf than all grains produced by agriculture in the entire United States. The majority of the seafood is processed into fish emulsion, fertilizer for crops; and into fish meal which is used for food for livestock including chickens and turkeys....so the point he’s making is that we will consume produce from the gulf whether we choose to or not....and the larger point being that this biosphere we call earth is intricately interconnected....a vast, but intimate nexus of contingency.....events and decisions all over the planet ramify into infinitely new possibilities....there is no such thing as independence...only radical dependence...some have named this the butterfly effect...that if the proverbial butterfly flaps its wings in Mobile Alabama...then it will affect weather patterns in some way in, say, Africa.

We are learning this reality more and more through science and technology...we now know that our DNA is only minimally different from the apes...we know that the lines are now blurred between what makes up matter and what makes up energy...we know that they came from the same source....modern physics tells us that everything is connected...animate and inanimate in a sacred symbiosis....It is as if this planet were one organism...all of us contingent parts...each person’s need our own...the knowledge, or recognition of this makes war in any shape or form absurd....In war we wound ourselves...This knowledge makes justice and compassion and mercy utterly necessary.... For our sake, the world’s sake...the same....a sacred common interest.

We begin our reading of Matthew now...today being the first day of the church year...Happy New Year! In the lectionary we enter today year A, which is Matthew’s year, with a little John tossed in on special occasions. The principal theme in Matthew I propose, and we’ll be hearing of it throughout the year, is that the so-called kingdom of God is *proximate* to our lives in earth....not fully manifest, but breaking in as we speak...as you’ve heard me say before the kingdom now and the kingdom not yet...but still Matthew sees a symbiosis, if you will, a mutuality between heaven and earth, an intimate proximity....that its coming, or perhaps better said, its returning and returning is very near to us and that the time is always ripe... and further Matthew argues that this coming arrives amid the people of faith

practicing the faith...practicing Torah, Torah the art of goodness... practicing the way of God in earth...and in each artful act of practice the kingdom arrives....in caring for the widow and orphan the kingdom arrives...in caring for the least among us, the kingdom arrives...in attending to the health of our sister and brother....feeding, clothing...giving drink.... the kingdom arrives...This isn't far flung philosophy, but the rudiments of how we live with each other...how God lives with us....contingent to each other, and contingent to God....alive always to possibility.

In our passage today the watchwords are to "keep awake"...pay attention...expect in our practice the arrival of this sacred commonweal in which no one is left out, nothing wasted...everything precious....to keep awake is to live consciously this vision of the good...Jesus of Nazareth the archetype of such a life....Jesus who represents the true human...not supernatural...but our true human nature...the way we are made...and we brothers and sisters are made for love....we don't know the time or the place...but we know through our acting out this faith of ours that this way, this way of God comes surely...We wouldn't be here if we didn't believe that, right?

I think Matthew is talking about real religion....not an aloof, capricious, supernatural, and exclusive God in the far reaches of the heavens...no, the whole point of the coming of the Christ is that our God lives and moves among us...that our God shares our very DNA...that in this sacred contingency in which we live....we depend on God...and don't you doubt it... God depends on us.

I think Advent might be my favorite season in the church (maybe its because of these vestments)...As the light dims from day to day...the winter solstice in her quiet coming...we stand together and claim the coming of the light in spite of the dark...the light of the world...we dear sojourners are those light bearers...the light that shows us the way to live for the greater good of this heaven in earth to which and for which we've been entrusted.... Jesus the light comes into the world....and that marks our coming of age in our world...The Advent of our maturity....the world pregnant with meaningful possibility.

Many of us here grew up in the south, in the Bible belt...and many of us were taught that we are unworthy...fallen....dirty, downright wicked... and that our only hope was Jesus' atoning death on the cross long ago...that God killed his son so that we wouldn't be cast into hell....I don't believe any of that. What I do believe is what I discern in scripture, and in conversation and study...that we are God-children...sons and daughters of God...placed on this earth to bear our creator's redeeming life to the world....To be the image of God for a world clinging to a holy hope...If we

dare proclaim that the church is the body of Christ then by God let's live as if that were true....bringing salvation...bringing dignity to a world shamed... bringing justice where there is inequality...peace where there is war...healing where there is disease...We in truth are always in Advent... we are always living our lives in hope for a world reconciled to itself...Hope an artifact from the future...Hope a shimmering symbol of what is to come... the God-world Jesus proclaimed....the God-world already in its becoming if we would but keep awake....Sleepers awake and see it in its marvelous coming!

The coming, the Advent of the light, dear people of God begins with us...it begins with our keeping awake....it begins with our practicing the faith...acting as if...and it begins now....pay attention and you won't be so much surprised when the day or the hour comes.