

December 2, 2012

Advent One

Text: 1 Thessalonians 3:9-13

Theme: "It all Begins Anew"

Today, Advent 1, it all begins anew, but as fall draws to a close in a few weeks and we are looking down the barrel of another Midwest winter, new life is not very much on our minds. In fact, it is just the opposite. We are in the process of shutting things down and digging in for the long dead season of winter. All the dead leaves are raked and bagged. All the dead flowers are cut back. The boats are out of the water and the vacation cabins are closed down. Everything is coming to a close.

But it is exactly at this time, on this day, that the Church celebrates the new year. While nature is boarding up and hunkering down, the Church is celebrating something new. During this Advent season, we look forward to the new heaven and the new earth that is coming. As I wrote this sermon, here is something else I realized. We have eight people in this congregation who will be experiencing this new church year for the very first time. We saw baptisms of eight new babies this past year at Trinity Matthew May, Brynlee Jacklin, Carmen Guerrero, Reese Scholtes, Caleb Ilken, Logan Thompson, Rebecca McGrath and Stephen Wass. They are beginning their first Advent season – new life right in the midst of winter – like roses blooming in the snow.

It is appropriate on this day of new beginnings that our Gospel is about the beginning of Jesus' last week of ministry on this earth. We see Jesus entering Jerusalem to begin his work that will consummate at the end of the week with his damnation, death and resurrection. Now you could look at this text and think that on this day of beginning, we have a text about the end. Except, that it is Jesus' work during holy week that allows us to begin anew each day.

Many of us witnessed the Baptisms of those 8 babies I mentioned earlier. And I'll tell you, after three funerals last week, I almost have the funeral liturgy memorized and that liturgy is very much on my mind. When we bury a Christian, we begin the liturgy with St. Paul's words to the Roman Christians in Romans 6.

"Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life. For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his." So God says that these babies are Baptized into Christ's death so that if they have a death like his, they shall certainly have a resurrection like his. Death and Resurrection is the cycle we live in our whole time on this earth. It is why God

made the seasons work the way they do. Every winter we witness death and every spring we witness rebirth. And beyond the seasons, God has given us examples all throughout nature of this phenomenon. Caterpillar to butterfly. The salmon's death swim upstream to spawn. The starvation of the male penguin to protect the life of the chick. Death to rebirth over and over again, except that no place in nature to we witness resurrection. That which dies is gone forever regardless of what rises from the ashes and that which rises will die eventually as well. With resurrection, however, we don't really die.

So while the death of winter and rebirth of spring is a nice reminder it is only a poor reflection of the reality for us. Baptism rescues us, renews us and delivers us from the grip of eternal death every day. Our new babies begin the cycle of the Church year today and 7 of them will spend their lives in that cycle of repentance and forgiveness being rescued every day and allowed to begin anew every day. One of them, Matthew, went to heaven just days after he was born. He gets to experience Advent for the first time within the heavenly host and that has got to be amazing.

As Jesus rode into Jerusalem, the disciples were saying,

“Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!” The Pharisees were not happy about this. They said,

“Teacher, rebuke your disciples.” And Jesus gave a really interesting answer. He answered,

“I tell you, if these were silent, the very stones would cry out.”
The people recognized that salvation was before them entering Jerusalem. How did they know? How do we know that spring is coming when we see buds on the tree? How do we know that soon there will be a beautiful butterfly when we see a cocoon hanging from a branch? All of nature understands the cycle of death and rebirth and when the Lord of Life is standing before you, faith responds.

“I tell you, if these were silent, the very stones would cry out.”
Today we rejoice as we remember our Lord’s work in Jerusalem, his death on the cross and damnation in our place. Today we celebrate the beginning of a new Church year, a new cycle that leads to his second coming and the resurrection of the dead. Today we prepare our hearts for that great and glorious day as we receive his body and blood and rejoice that God is with us, in us, surrounding us and preparing us for our eternal life with him.