

Transforming Hollow Days into Holy Days 1-Advent-C

We begin a new year in the calendar of the church today. The focus of the season called Advent directs us to be active in our faith as we “wait” with “hope” the “coming” of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Advent is a new beginning for Christians. Advent is a time of change of hearts and attitudes as we prepare for the promise of God’s presence. We wait patiently because our hope is that his presence will make life better, his presence will give clarity to our existence, his presence will help us make sense of life.

There are times when we lose our focus and Christmas, with all its commercial frenzy, is a good case for leaving town, before the next snowstorm and leaving the frenzy behind. Well, we at Trinity, have had some frenzy lately and it has contributed to our loss of focus. The good news on this first Sunday of Advent is that we are here for something bigger than 419 E. Court Street. And we as the church of God know what that is.

Some years ago, Carl Reiner and Mel Brooks did a wonderfully popular series of comedy sketches called the "2000-Year-Old Man" which prompted several hilarious albums. The premise has Reiner interviewing Brooks playing the old man and inquiring how life was way back when. At one point, Reiner asks the old man,

"Did you always believe in God?"

Brooks replies, "No. We had a guy in our village named Phil, and for a time we worshiped him."

Reiner wonders, "You worshiped a guy named Phil? Why?"

"Because he was big, and mean, and he could break you in two with his bare hands!"

The interviewer asks, "Did you have prayers?"

Brooks answers, "Yes, would you like to hear one? O Phil, please don't be mean, and hurt us, or break us in two with your bare hands."

Reiner: "So when did you start worshiping God?"

And then this wonderful answer:

"Well, one day a big thunderstorm came up, and a lightning bolt hit Phil. We gathered around and saw that he was dead.

Then we said to one another,

"There's somthin' bigger than Phil!"

(Collected Sermons, David E. Leininger, Collected Sermons, www.eSermons.com,

adapted from Carl Reiner and Mel Brooks, '2000 Year Old Man').

Would you agree that there is somethin' bigger than Phil? That there is somethin' bigger than whether we keep doors to 419 E Court St. open or not? And, that there is somethin' bigger going on when we lose our faith and forget that there is somethin' bigger and more important than Phil! That somethin' bigger is found in our second reading. It is about our longing for a Savior, our hope in his salvation, and our love for one another.

St. Paul's first existing letter and thus the first Christian document we have was written to the Christian community of Thessalonica, a city of Greece, where the church was experiencing significant growing pains. The letter expresses the concerns and praise of Paul and his companions Silvanus and Timothy for these Christians who had left the worship of idols and come to know Jesus as Lord. Paul praised them for their courage and was concerned about a growing despair that Jesus return was delayed/ Paul was anxious that their new faith would be tested and so he sent Timothy to bolster and encourage them.

Paul's letter expresses longing to see these Christian friends face to face. Paul and his companions long to see them, praise them, encourage them to love each other and grow in holiness as the community of Thessalonica waits and longs to see Jesus. Personal reunions make waiting worthwhile. When we love someone we have not seen in sometime we want to go to them, report on one's life and rejoice with them in its goodness.

An attorney said that the greatest gift he ever received in his life was a note his dad gave him on Christmas. It read, "Son, this year I will give you 365 hours. An hour every day after dinner. We'll talk about whatever you want to talk about. We'll go wherever you want to

go, play whatever you want to play. It will be your hour." That dad kept his promise and renewed it every year.

That is why I will be leaving you on the third weekend of Advent to see my daughter who lives in Durham, North Carolina. That is Advent, a Latin word for "coming", a word that the Christians of Greece called "parousia," to express their longing for the coming and presence of Jesus Christ.

Our faith expresses our longing for our best friend Jesus to come back. Like the Thessalonian Christians we are disappointed that he has not come and we wait again and again, year after year for his return. Like them some of us are disappointed when we don't have the same spirit of "family" that used to be.

As we wait for his return we are reminded of Christ's birth and rejoice that since God sent his Son because he loved us, He will send him once again when the earth is ready to receive him. While we wait for his coming we are to focus and be about God's work. And so we refocus on loving one another and personal purity of life as we make ourselves ready. We know that is bigger than anything that can happen to us in this world.

In the Peanuts comic strip, Linus and Lucy are standing at the window looking out at the rain falling. Lucy says to Linus, "Boy, look at it rain...What if it floods the earth?" Linus, the resident biblical scholar for the Peanuts, answers, "It will never do that...in the ninth chapter of Genesis, God promised Noah that would never happen again, and the sign of the promise is the rainbow." With a smile on her face, Lucy replies, "Linus, you've taken a great load off my mind." To which Linus responds, "Sound theology has a way of doing that." Charles Schultz, Peanuts, adapted by David E. Leininger

People of God, keep your sense of humor, keep your faith close to your heart. Our Christian walk is not about 419 E. Court Street or any other property. May we walk by faith and with our hearts open to God. Amen!