



The Rev. Alan Sutherland, Rector

December 9, 2007

Advent 2, 2007

There are many things that are simply music to my ears. One of them is when somebody asks a question about a sermon that I preached. Most people are usually very polite and say something on the way out of church. When I served in Atlanta there were 4 clergy on staff and one Sunday I was not the preacher but on the way out of church someone complimented my sermon. So I thanked them.

I was once told that my sermons are sometimes like the peace of God. They passeth all understanding.

But last week was different for one person because they asked me a question about something I said during a sermon. The question was "What really is the foundation of our life together as a community?"

Part of the answer to that question lies in the focus for this second Sunday of our advent season. Today we are asked to think about the prophets. There were thousands of prophets but we only have a record of a few of them in our bibles. They all had many similarities. They shared a deep faith in God. They all shared a vision of God and how God intended for his children to live.

They each lived in a time when God's intention for his children had somehow become distorted and changed.

They each lived in a community that was supposed to be godly in all their living and their doing, but for the most part it was far from what God intended it to be.

God's children had been given a vision but for the most part that vision had become blurred or even lost.

God had covenanted a relationship with his children, but for the most part that covenant was ignored or even broken.

God's children had been asked to live in covenant relationship with one another but for the most part that covenant had been neglected.

God's children had been called to be a people who reflected an unconditional love but that love had become conditioned and harnessed.

What began as a people who were called into covenant relationship with God began to develop into an institution that would lose its way. It was in all this and to all this, at different periods in the life of the people of God came the prophets. They came to call people back to their foundations, back to the vision that God had for them, back to the discipline of the covenant.

When people did not respond, then God came himself. The word made flesh. God incarnate in the person of Jesus of Nazareth.

Jesus talked of a new way of relationship with God. A new covenant. A new call to a vision that God has for his children.

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We look to Jesus for that call and that vision yet it seems that our chapter of history is very similar to the chapters of history before Jesus in which God sent his prophets. Nothing much has changed.

What I said of God's people before Jesus can easily be said of the Christian community today.

The message of the prophets, fulfilled in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus tells us that the foundation of our community is God, and the purpose of our community is to show that love of God. The loving God part is always the easiest. It is the loving one another that creates the difficulties.

Because truly loving one another asks us to stop thinking only about ourselves.

True community, true godly living begins to happen when we move from thinking of ourselves to showing a concern for others. It is the small acts of kindness, the small sacrifices that say to another person I love you. I'm happy you are here. Its letting somebody go in front of you, smiling at somebody you don't even know. It is not trying to prove that you are always right in a discussion. It's sharing a small burden with somebody.

True community is seen when people begin to use their gifts. Not just the gifts that Paul tells us of but the thousands of gifts we all share- humility, tenderness listening, caring, forgiveness, and encouragement.

A gift is not necessarily linked to a function but it is linked to the quality of love.

The prophets called the children of God back to the foundation of their faith. They called them back to the reasons they live in community. They called them back to the purpose of living. To love God and to love our neighbor as we love ourselves.

The foundation of our life together is none other than the God who loves us, redeems us, and sustains us.

The reflection of our life in God is when we are truly loving one another, welcoming, encouraging and sustaining one another.

When that happens the sermon lived is far better than the sermon preached and the community does reflect the peace of God which passes all understanding.

Amen

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