

**Don Brown**

**St. Mary's SF**

**Advent I A**

**16.12.27**

**I'm here this morning to give you a heads up. The beginning is near. We are a bit over a month from the turn of the calendar year but for Episcopalians and in many other Christian churches, today is the beginning of the New Year. This is the First Sunday of Advent.**

**The four Sundays of Advent, along with the weekdays that lead us to the celebration of Christmas, are a time not just for all the frantic preparations, activities, and parties that are so much a part of this time of year. These days of Advent are meant for us to get reconnected to the meaning of coming of the Christ.**

**The scriptures read on these Sundays are chosen to prepare us to embrace, once again, Jesus' birth in Bethlehem, rekindle his birth in our lives today, and to remind us of Christ's coming at the end of time. In each of these comings, past, present, and future, we are put in touch with a hopefulness that is from God.**

**The last year in this parish and in our nation has been difficult, to say the least. But there is something about the turning of the secular year and the**

**Christian year that brings with it the promise of a new beginning. And new beginnings are hope filled.**

**The scripture lessons heard on this First Sunday of Advent point us toward a vision of hope, the yearning for goodness and harmony that comes from God and is called into being by God.**

**Isaiah speaks of a time when “nation shall not lift up sword against nation,” when nations will “beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks...”**

**St. Paul urges us to “lay aside the works of darkness,” that is to stop doing, being and thinking those things that separate us from one another and from God, and become people who “love one another.”**

**In the Gospel, Jesus warns that he is coming to us at a time we least expect. What I find hopeful in this rather ominous warning is it affirms that God comes to us in surprising ways.**

**I heard the other day about a man who went into a restaurant and was waiting by himself for the maître d' to notice him so he could then be seated. While he was standing there he grabbed some peanuts off the counter to munch on. Out of nowhere the man heard a voice that said, “Nice suit you’re wearing. Is that an Armani?”**

The man looked around, saw no one. He dipped into the peanuts a second time. The voice came back again and said, “Beautiful shiny shoes. They must be Ballys.” Looking carefully around, the man still saw no one.

Finally the maître d' showed up to seat the now very perplexed customer. After a bit of hesitation, the customer explained rather tentatively about this disembodied voice he'd heard. “Oh that,” replied the maître d' matter of factly, “must be the peanuts.” “The peanuts?” questioned the man. “Yes,” replied the maître d', “They're complimentary.”

You just never know where the positive surprises are going to come from if you are open to them. Jesus' point in his warning given in this morning's gospel lesson is that in the journey of life you can become so preoccupied with all of the hum drum of things that have to be done, or with the distractions of life, or with disappointing outcomes that you fail to see what matters. And what matters in the sometimes tragic and painful circumstance of life, is never losing sight of the hope of God for our world and for us: a world where nations live in harmony and where people reach out to one another with love and forgiveness.

To be open to the surprises of God is to come to the realization that no matter what has happened to you in life, in the dark times and in the light times, God has been present.

Each of us is a composite of our past history; the people and events that have helped shape us and brought us to this present moment. Some of us have

**had horrendous pasts where we have been terribly wounded. Yet those very wounds can make us more vulnerable and open to God's presence and love.**

**Some of us have behaved in ways that were clearly wrong and hurtful to others and ourselves but we can make amends and walk in a new direction. Some of us have been very fortunate and have known great love and affirmation, and we can pass that love on to others rather than hoarding it for ourselves.**

**Advent reminds us to embrace the vision of great hope God has for us and for this world in which we live. Everything in our lives can be a building block that shapes us into being more loving people, people who carry with them evidence of God's light in a dark world, people who in the midst of despair and meaninglessness offer genuine hope.**

**Remember to be thankful for the ways in which you have been blessed. Be watchful for the surprising ways in which God's presence comes into your life. And in the midst of this Advent holiday time, and all of the time, claim the hope that is God's gift to you. Amen**

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