

JESUS IS COMING, LOOK BUSY

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Advent 2C

Advent is a season of such conflict in many respects. Even with this Sunday being the Sunday when peace is the traditional image there is little if anything peaceful about this season, at least the way we seem to live into it.

We rush towards Christmas; most do not seem able to wait while the messages of scripture speak of watching and waiting for the arrival of Christ. Advent is about the arrival of Jesus in two ways, one as the baby who arrives on Christmas, but also in a more apocalyptic sense as in the second coming, the coming of the kingdom. We are certainly in a hurry for the baby, but I'm not sure we want to think about the coming of the kingdom. I suspect we are less anxious for that.

The dichotomy of this hit me the other day in of all places BJ's Wholesale Club. I was picking up a couple of items we needed and there walking down one of the aisles was a man wearing a T-shirt that said. "Jesus is coming, look busy." Wow I thought. First of there's a sermon in that shirt and then I thought what an interesting concept. Jesus is coming so that means we must do something or at least appear to be doing something. Yet the shirt gave no indication as to what type of busyness Jesus would approve of. This prompted me to reflect on this idea of what would our preparations for Jesus' return look like, especially if we were to be judged by Jesus on these preparations. Is this busyness internal, external, prayer, acts of charity, just what would this look like?

Now I have just finished a period of enforced waiting. No Christmas lights or decorations are up in our house yet. I am not sure they will get up on the outside this year. We have a few items up in the house, the tree is bought, but sits outside. James is in Columbus visiting friends this week so we are going to wait until he comes home to decorate since this will be the last Christmas he will spend with us for awhile as he travels to Japan. Yet I am not missing the rather frantic activity. I have to sit and be quiet more than I normally would.

The other day I was sitting in my recliner resting and watching Wendy get out some small little items and ornaments the other day. She has a rather unusual way of storing these items. We have a couple of large boxes in the attic which contain most of our decorations for the tree, the door etc, but these little items have always been stored in the drawer closest to where they are used. So anytime during the year, you might open an end table at our house and find one of them. This is a good analogy for how we might explore Advent, finding Jesus or a sign of Jesus in random places.

This is a way to prepare for his arrival, by actually looking for him, especially in the everyday.

John the Baptist repeats the call of Isaiah that is also found in our passage from Baruch that the mountains and hills be made low. That we prepare by making the valleys level ground. Today we do not understand the significance or this image of a straight road. In the time of Isaiah there were few if any roads. Travel was difficult. An easy path was a great gift. A system of roads would have been known to the people of Christ's time, but they still were rather rare and mostly for commerce or especially for the military. With our interstates today the idea of difficult travel is more one of congestion than the ease of the drive.

A way to search for Jesus is to look for ways we can prepare the way for ourselves and for others.

When Jeff and James were children we lived on the east side of Cleveland in Shaker Heights and attended St. Paul's Episcopal Church. St. Paul's was and is the largest parish in the diocese of Ohio. We prepared and served a meal on the last Monday evening every month at a huge Baptist church in the inner city. We took that night because that was always the heaviest night being at the end of the month. Every year we also prepared a huge Christmas dinner. The rector, Nick White who preached at my installation as rector here, asked Wendy and I if we could provide some music during the meal. The four of us played at the children's pageant each year and so we brought our instruments with us. As the meal was progressing we set up and began to play Christmas Carols. As we played one year, a homeless woman came up to the small stage and asked if we could play a couple of her favorites. We were happy to oblige and she sat down on the edge of the stage to listen. But then something amazing happened. This dirty disheveled woman with some obvious mental issues began to quietly sing along. As we continued to play she continued to name songs and she started singing louder. Now most of you are thinking oh I bet that was wonderful. But it was wonderful for she had an absolutely gorgeous voice. Soon the room got quiet as all sat, ate and listened to this amazing performance. Then they burst into applause for her when she finished.

Then requests came from others and soon we had a huge sing along going. In the midst of all this poverty and woe came a moment of total joy and celebration. For a few moments there was no rich or poor, just a group of Christians singing God's praise. The mountains were made low and valleys a plane. That Advent we were part of a moment that truly prepared the way for Jesus. Yet the person who truly made it happen was definitely among the last and the least. The low were lifted up that night, if only for a short time. We found Jesus that night.

Prepare the way. Make the road, level and straight. What are the mountains and valleys in our community that we can work on to make the path straight for the coming of Jesus?

We can also look internally to prepare. What mountains in your inner self need to be made low. What valleys need to be filled in to make a path for the Lord into your life?

Jesus is coming, look busy, but the busy at what, that is the question to ponder this Advent.