

Homily – Be Ready

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Three weeks Jeff and I spent some time getting ready. Our weather apps showed that rain was expected for four to five days in row. In some parts of the country there would be dread in anticipating several days of rain. But, here on our drought-prone Central Coast, there is a sense of relief. The rains bring relief from the fretting about whether we will have enough water.

So Jeff cleaned out the gutters on the house, and made sure the downspouts to our rainwater catchment tanks were working. I focused on clean up debris and clearing the drains we have in the ground to make sure we weren't going to be surrounded by ponds of water. We like the rain, but we all know it can do damage. With a bit of preparation we were ready.

Today, we start the season of Advent. These four weeks before Christmas are our annual time of preparation for things to come. While some jump right into Christmas carols, we use Advent music, and the color blue, to help us get ready for but not jump right into Christmas. We anticipate our annual celebration of the birth and the way it changed the universe, but we spend this time getting ready.

Today's Gospel reading repeats the participle verb "coming" five times. Three times we heard about the coming of the Son of Man, once we heard of the coming of the thief, and once we have the coming of the Lord.

Today's advent reading is about being prepared and being ready, but it is not about preparing for the coming of a baby. Instead, we traditionally interpret these words from Jesus to be a call to get ready for the second coming of Christ. And, these words are still relevant to us today.

Two thousand years after the birth of Jesus, are we ready for Christ to come into our lives? Are you prepared?

For some there is a sense of dread when asked this question about Christ. For some a five-day forecast of rain brings dread, and for others it brings a sense of relief and hope. My goal this morning is to give you a sense of hope and excitement about the coming of Christ.

Now, to our discredit, for years, today's reading from the Gospel according to Matthew has been misused to scare us. I would like to say that our churches never go astray, but sometimes we lose sight of the Holy Spirit, and go in a direction that has

nothing to do with Jesus. We all see that our churches have gone astray when they say that Jesus and the Bible support things that are racist, sexist, homophobic and destroy God's creation.

But, our churches also go astray when we used Jesus and the Bible to raise anxiety and dread. Some churches have pieced together timelines and signs of end times that have nothing to do with Jesus. How many children have been frightened into behaving or they will be "left behind." Some churches falsely proclaim that you had better join the church, give your life to Jesus, or profess a certain type of faith or else... To our disgrace sometimes we use the words of Jesus to frighten and shame, rather than lift up and give hope. Let's change that.

In my studies over the last few years, I have been looking at the concept of the Universal Christ. A few years back, many of us studied a book with this same name by Richard Rohr. The Universal Christ helps us better understand the second person of the Trinity, and I think it can help us prepare for the coming of Christ into our lives. Let me explain.

Before the beginning of time the first emanation from God was the Christ, the perfect union of spirit and matter. And, the Christ, this perfect union is throughout all of time and space. The distant galaxies, our Sun, the deepest part of the oceans, all the critters in the jungles of the Amazon, and all people have Christ. All of creation is imbued with the Christ, this perfect union of spirit and matter.

And, two thousand years ago, perhaps when humanity was finally ready for it Jesus came into the world as a baby boy. Jesus is the perfect union of human and divine.

Jesus is the living embodiment of the Christ. Christ is infinite and beyond our understanding, but Jesus is a finite point of reality, which opens the door to knowledge of infinite reality. Thus "knowing Jesus" brings us a glimpse into the second person of the Trinity.

And through Jesus we can understand once again that the Christ is the perfect union between an infinite God and finite creation. Again, the Christ is the flawless joining of spirit and matter. And, two thousand years ago, the baby Jesus was the complete joining of human and divine.

To our joy, we are made in the image of God. Which means, there is beauty inherent in us. You and I, and all of creation are also the joining of spirit and matter though we are the, as of yet, incomplete joining.

Now, Christians often focus on the sinful nature of humans and the flaws within creation. This is why some churches think it is OK to use the words of Jesus to scare us and raise anxiety.

However, this theological doctrine of “original sin” has run its course. And, the Universal Christ can help us refocus instead on the theological doctrine of “original beauty.”

Again, before the beginning of time, spirit and matter were joined together in Christ in a beautiful way. Christ is not a plan-B to fix things that have gone wrong, but was there from before the beginning.

An understanding of the Universal Christ invites us beyond the negative notion of history as being a “fall from grace.” Instead, we can hold the long and positive view of history as a slow emergence or evolution into ever-greater consciousness. Furthermore, when we see the perfect union of matter and spirit in Jesus, we can dare to imagine and grow into the same union for ourselves. God has already created us with beauty inside each and every one of us. All we need do is embrace what we already have been given.

Christ is in all things. Christ is in us and around us. The Christ that is revealed to us by Jesus is continuously being born into the universe. Perhaps, in today’s Gospel reading Jesus is calling us to be prepared for something that is already happening around us and through us. Don’t wait. It is already happening.

Now, when Jeff and I were preparing for the rains, we were clearing out muck and debris that had gotten into the gutters, drains, and downspouts. We were fortunate that the previous owners of our house had already put these things in place, and we were just maintaining them.

In this same way, God has already created you with beauty. Often we need to clear out the muck and debris that have been layered onto our lives and into our souls. We must do some work to reveal what God has already placed into us.

Worship, prayer, service, and study are all spiritual practices and ways for us to be mindful of Christ and the beauty we already have. We have the beauty but so does every human who has ever lived. Do you see Christ in all or are there some in whom you don’t see Christ? If so, then you might have some work to do to prepare.

Get ready. Be prepared. Christ is already coming. Christ is already here, so embrace the God given beauty that is already inside of you. You are beautiful!