



The Rev. Alan Sutherland, Rector

December 14, 2008

Advent 3 2008

Today, St Johns is breaking with tradition and we are breaking it for a very good reason.

Many years ago there were some people called **THEY** who messed with the lectionary. Changed the way that advent was to be observed.

You see Advent used to have a very orderly sequence to it, and the readings reflected that sequence. The first Sunday we focused on the prophets, the second Sunday we focused on John the Baptist, the third Sunday we focused on Mary and the 4th Sunday we focused on the birth of Jesus and what that was going to mean for the children of God.

We even had words that described each Sunday- watch prepare rejoice and behold.

This third Sunday had developed quite a tradition around it. It was called Gaudate Sunday or rejoice Sunday. We even had a pink candle in the advent wreath and we wore pink vestments with a rose on because it was also called rose Sunday. Instead of a psalm we said the Magnificat. As a token of conciliation we have a choice to say the Magnificat this week but we also say it next week as well. It used to be that this was the Sunday devoted entirely to Mary.

What was not changed though was the collect. It begins with the words stir up. Well I do not think even the writer of the collect could have imagined what was stirred when the sequence of advent that was so familiar was changed.

So it seems kinda silly to do all our Mary stuff when we are focused on the Baptist stuff so this year we are breaking with tradition. This year we will wait till the 4th Sunday, next week, when the focus of the lectionary is on Mary to light our pink candle and wear our pink vestments.

Phew! Change. It can be so difficult at times.

I think that the revisers of the lectionary left the collect with the words stir up for a very good reason.

Change stirs us up.

We change the liturgy and people get very upset.

We change the use of the buildings and people get bent out of shape.

We try something new or different and people say we have never done this before or it will not suit me.

And that is only in the church.

When we think of whatever organizations, businesses or groups we belong to, the same thing always happens.

We get stirred up because of change.

ST. JOHN'S EPISCOPAL CHURCH

Established in 1847

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Except when we like the change then we love it and it is not difficult at all.

But you know it just might be that we get stirred up about the wrong things. The collect asks God to stir up god's power. Stir up this power because we are sorely hindered by our sins

Well one of the more destructive of sins is the sin of pride and selfishness. That is when we think that what we think is always right. That we want to do, or how we want to do something, must be the only way to do it or the only way how to do it. The other attitude is that we are so familiar and comfortable with how things are that we balk at any idea that anything needs to be changed. It has been like this or done like this forever so therefore it needs to stay as it is forever. And to prove my point- God agrees with me.

But it is the times that we do not agree with God that causes us the anguish. Because usually that is when we need to change.

You see when God came to us in this little baby God asked for lots of changes in his people.

God came to his people when the way people worshipped was far more important than why they worshipped. That had to change.

God came to his people at a time when forgiveness was practically unattainable because of the hoops that people were made to jump through to satisfy the religious authorities. That had to change.

God came at a time when a persons worth was measured by how many fields, barns, houses and servants he owned and not by his character. That had to change.

God came to his people at a time when it was acceptable to exclude people who were deemed undesirable. Untouchable. Not like us. That had to change.

The real change was coming with Jesus but the preparation for change came with John the Baptizer. John certainly stirred things up preaching a message of repentance. Repentance simply means to change your mind. Change how you think about god and your relationship with god because the one who is coming is going to change your heart and set you on fire with the Holy Spirit. To change not only your mind and your heart but the whole world if people will listen.

And that is what this third Sunday of advent is all about.

When we listen to gods call to us, change is inevitable. To be a Christian is to be in the business of change.

Let us not be afraid of the changes that God calls us to make.

Amen.

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