

## A new day coming

A sermon by the Reverend Robert Bruce Edson in St. John's Episcopal Church, Franklin, Massachusetts on the First Sunday of Advent, November 29, 2009.

*Jesus said, "There will be signs in the sun, the moon, and the stars, and on earth distress among nations confused by the roaring of the sea and the waves.* Luke 21: 25, 26

This great season of Advent is a time of anticipation, a time for us to prepare to celebrate the birth of Christ. The Advent wreath reminds us that God's love is never ending. The evergreens remind us of the gift of life and of our need to grow in the knowledge of Christ. The four candles mark the four weeks of Advent in preparation for celebrating Christmas.

Christianity began as a sect within Judaism that anticipated the coming of the end of this age, known as the apocalypse, or the *eschaton* and the *Parousia*. The early Christians fully expected the sign of the end of the age to be marked by the return of Christ in their lifetime. By the next generation, in the year 66 A.D., the revolt of the Jews was believed by many to be a sign that God was bringing on the end. The destruction of the temple and the fall of Jerusalem in 70 A.D. sent the Jewish people into exile in what is known as the diaspora. In contrast, Christians were shifting their emphasis from gloom and doom to spreading the gospel of hope in Jesus Christ. They were learning to measure time in God's terms and not their own.

Since ancient times, people have looked for signs of God intervening in human history. The prophet Jeremiah foresaw the coming of a savior, a descendent of King David who would bring justice and righteousness. The Jewish people longed for a messiah who would bring order out of chaos and a new creation in which the rule of God would prevail. Christians came to believe that the end time would be less a catastrophic doom and more an emergence of a world transformed in God's own way. The coming of a messiah was seen as a restoration of Israel's fortunes politically and militarily.

History tells us that a change by revolution often means change for the worse rather than for the better. In 1917, the Russian Bolsheviks ousted the Czar and got the totalitarianism of Marx and Lenin and the repressive and murderous regime of Joseph Stalin. In 1933, the Germans ousted Paul Von Hindenburg as President of the Weimar Republic in favor of Adolph Hitler. In 1959, the overthrow of the Cuban dictator Fulgencio Batista began the fifty years of communist dictatorship of Fidel Castro. In the 1979, the overthrow of the Shah of Iran gave way to the Ayatollah Khomeini and his repressive regime. History has shown that regime change is not always for the better.

The history of civilization has seen continual contention between the forces of chaos and order. We still have a long way to go toward the vision of a new world order of justice and righteousness. It cannot be attained by human effort alone; only by relying upon God's guidance can we hope for a better world. Until that time, nations will continue to rise up against nation, and there will still be earthquakes, floods, famine, false prophets and persecution. For every force overcome, a new one awaits to take its place.

Advent is about hope in the face of what seems hopeless. We hold to the confidence that God is present and in charge and that we are not abandoned, even in the midst of great turmoil and confusion. For God to be in charge, we must have our priorities in order with a greater sense of reliance upon God. Christianity believes that God has entered the human condition in the coming of Christ Jesus to lead us from chaos and confusion to a new world order. In this Advent

season we wait in expectation for God to enter again into the drama of human history. We look to God to break the silence of our waiting and enter our hearts and transform our lives, renewing our hope for the present and restoring confidence in the future.

If you're anything like I am, you don't like to be kept waiting. In Samuel Beckett's 1955 play, *Waiting for Godot*, the characters of Vladimir and Estragon wait for some unknown figure that never appears. "Nothing happens; nobody comes, nobody goes; it's awful!" We grow impatient waiting for an overdue child to be born, for a job offer that doesn't come, for people who are perpetually late, deliveries that never arrive and repair people who never appear.

We long for an end to injustice, intolerance, crime, hunger, poverty and homelessness. While there have been great strides in these areas, there still needs to be an effort in the minds and hearts of those who have the power to work for a more just society. God's promises are not an illusion, but a reality of which we must not stand in the way. We must be creative in cultivating the very best in us as a people to prepare the way for Christ's presence to be visible in our midst.

Though there may be signs here and there of the completion of this age, it is not ours to know the time or place. We may think we see signs in the upheavals of people and nations, but we must keep our heads raised in anticipation of what and how God wants the kingdom to be realized. Being ready for the coming of the kingdom is all about who we are and how we live.

This Advent season is a time for us to reflect and prepare for a new order and direction in our lives. In a few weeks, we will be decorating our homes and the church for Christmas. We lament that department stores are so far ahead of us as they count on a major percentage of their business at this time. Christ did not come to boost the economy. He came for the much greater reason to save us from ourselves and bring reconciliation to all people.

This Advent season is about being attentive to the things of the present to provide hope for the future. Join with me in bringing God's reign of understanding, compassion, justice and peace unlike any we have ever known. We can and we must be part of making that hope a reality.