

Hail to the Lord's Anointed
(first in The Poetry of Christ's Coming series)

***The tide of time shall never
his covenant remove.
His name shall last forever –
that name to us is Love.***

Jeremiah 33:14-16

Luke 21:25-36

Brentwood Presbyterian Church – November 29, 2009

I'm going to be doing something a bit different
over this Advent, Christmas, and Epiphany season.
I've decided to preach on texts from favourite Christmas carols
rather than from the Scriptures.

They pick up on major themes in the Scriptures
in poetic words that have a deep *resonance* for me
and I hope for you.

In using the word *resonance*, I mean
that sense of being in tune or vibrating in sympathy
with a neighbouring source of energy.

It's being in sync with someone else,
getting in tune and in rhythm with another.

In our carol for this morning, it's resonating
with God's covenant of love,
with God's presence with us as a loving friend.
Remember those wonderful words that Jesus spoke,
recorded in John's Gospel,
when he told them they were no longer servants,
but friends
because they now knew what God wanted.
He wanted friends who resonated with his love.
He wanted friends in sync with his purpose
who would be a blessing to others
on the strength of being first loved by God
in Jesus Christ.

For Christians, Advent is the season
when we wait in great anticipation
to celebrate once again
the greatest miracle ever done –

the salvation of the world
through the birth, life, death, and ascension
of a peasant child and itinerant preacher in a remote corner
of the world's most powerful empire.

In that person, whose name was Jesus,
Christians believe that God came to be with us in love,
to remove all barriers to flourishing as human beings,
and to empower us to bless others.

That miracle is worth contemplating,
year after year.

That miracle is worth communicating,
year after year.

That miracle is worth celebrating,
year after year.

And that's what we are doing here at Brentwood
over this Advent, Christmas, and Epiphany season –
contemplating, communicating, and celebrating
the greatest miracle the world has known –
the coming of God into our midst in human flesh
to be our loving friend.

God did this to fulfill his promise,
as Jeremiah assures us
in our Old Testament text this morning.
The core promise of God's covenant is made to Abraham.
It is simple in words,
but profoundly challenges our attitudes and behaviours.

In brief,
God promises to be Abraham and his descendants
to make them – that's us - a blessing to all nations.

So, I will be with you, says God.
That's good.
We feel accepted, welcomed, protected, safe, and secure
in the presence and embrace
of the greatest power in the universe.

This sense of being in the arms of an invincible guardian
is very comforting and reassuring,
a feeling of confidence
that calms our many fears.

It is a truly profound gift of grace to be relished in gratitude.

But it is not the only part of the covenant.
This sense of security in the arms of the Lord
is what we get from God.

What God gets from us
– the other part of the deal, as it were –
is our willingness to be a blessing to all nations.

We get God's love in order to share God's love.

We are loved in order to be able to love.

We are made friends of God in order to be friends with ourselves and others.

This mutual covenant
- God doing something for us and we doing something for God –
is the foundation of the Great Commandment.

'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and
with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbour as yourself.'
(Luke 10:27)

"That which is hateful to you, do not do to your fellow. That is the whole Torah;
the rest is the explanation; go and learn. "
([Talmud](#), *Shabbat* 31a)

And the kind of learning the Talmud talks about here
is not just head learning.
These are lessons that are written on the heart
and lived out in everything we do.
This is a way of life that, when lived faithfully,
endures the tides of time and stands forever.

That's the other thing I like
about this poetic phrase in this Advent carol.
It takes seriously the context in which this love of God
is received and resonates with us.

Time and what happens in this world in time
is taken seriously here,
just as it is in the Scriptures.

Christianity is not about escaping from the tides of times.
It is about redeeming them.

It is about taking action in the flesh
to be a blessing to all peoples.

Karen Armstrong, the British writer on world religions,
was interviewed last Sunday on CBC's *Tapestry*.
It was a wide-ranging and fascinating program,
worth listening to on pod-cast at their website.

Armstrong said at one point
that the core of all the world's great religions
was found in two practices
- silence and compassion.

They encourage silence to encounter and engage the divine
and they encourage compassion to bring people together.

The tides of time are usually noisy
with the frightening sounds of war,
the piercing cries of suffering,
the muffled screams of abuse,
the clashing sounds of conflict,
and the chilling sounds of self-righteousness.

That's not where God is found.

God lets us find him in the silence,
in times and places where we can listen,
like this space and time and fellowship of worship.

God seeks us and calls us and brings us
into community to learn with open minds and hearts
what God has to say
that resonates deep in our souls.

To hear what God has to say, we have to be silent and listen.

That is when and where we enjoy
enjoy the true depths of God's friendship with us,
the covenant of God's steadfast love.

Celtic Christians had a wonderful perspective
on this idea of listening to God.
They saw the day starting when they went to bed.
The day started in the silence of sleep
when they understood that they were more open
to the workings of the Spirit in shaping their lives.

The noise of the tides of time were muted
and God could speak to them
with fewer distractions.

I like that idea.

And it doesn't stop with simply listening for God in the silences.
There is another part to the covenant.
That's the blessing others part.
You can't have one without the other.
They stand forever joined.
And the name for them is Love.

We lit the Candle of Hope this morning
in our Advent Wreath.
Hope comes when compassion is practiced.
Hope is made real when we help others.
Hope creates light when we love.

I want to make one more comment.

I think love is hard work.

In my experience,
it does not come easily.
Our low self-esteem makes it hard for us to accept God's love
so freely offered in Jesus Christ.
When we resist that love,
it's well nigh impossible to truly love others.
Our fears block love's flourishing.

So here's my commitment for the next 6 weeks
and I invite you to consider doing something similar.
I'm going to create time to sit in silence with God,
to listen for what God has to say about love and blessing,
about the covenant of Love that stands forever.

This is a simple act in the midst of the tides of time
with their grating noises.

But in the midst of that simplicity,
I anticipate that profound things will happen.
I anticipate that I will learn more of God
and how best to a blessing in Jesus name.

Amen