

NOVEMBER 30, 2019-SUMMARY SERMON-JOHN TSCHUDY

SCRIPTURE LESSON ISAIAH 2:1-5, ROMANS 13:11-14, MATTHEW 24:36-44

Much of what happens in worship is a struggle between how people interpret scripture and church tradition. The Season of Advent is a good example of this. As the church began to organize its ritual the tradition in other faiths was to have a period of time to prepare for significant Holy Days. Thus it was perfectly normal for the early church to develop a tradition of a season of preparation for celebrating the Birth of Christ and welcoming Christ into our lives. Once the date of “Christ’s Mass,” celebrating the birth of Christ was decided, the proceeding four weeks was declared to be the time of preparation and prayer. Various pagan symbols such as wreaths and logs and candles were reinterpreted to help the new converts understand the season of preparation. At this time there was basically one church that would evolve into the Roman Catholic Church.

When the Reformation began some Christian traditions believed that the entire church had to be Reformed and “Purified”, which meant removing anything that wasn’t found in scripture and since Advent wasn’t mentioned in scripture, the tradition was abandoned by some traditions. But others kept the tradition alive and the modern tradition of Advent has continued to be a time where following various rituals was designed to help us prepare ourselves and our lives for the coming of Christ into our lives. The lighting of various colored candles on wreathes of evergreen and holly, symbolizing eternal life or logs to mark off either the weeks or days until Christmas are now common in churches. Another thing useful for families is the Advent Calendar, with each day having a door that can be opened revealing some symbol of the season, either religious or secular.

Our Scriptures are all about preparing ourselves for the coming of Christ. Some have interpreted texts like these as pointing to an “End of time” meaning, when Christ will come again and the world as we know it will end. Others understand it as speaking of our death when we will “Meet our maker.” Some argue that these texts are about living every day of our lives as if we will have an encounter with God or Christ and want to be living our lives in a way that will please God.

It seems to me that this is the direction that the prophet Isaiah wants to go. Speaking again to the people of Israel recovering from the exile, he is encouraging them to return to the worship of God and the way God has called them to live. This is where I believe the entire scripture lesson comes down. It isn’t about being ready for a once in a lifetime event. Being a follower of Christ is about living each day in the way God calls us to live.

For Paul, he believed that Christ and the end of time was going to come soon and this has had a powerful influence on some traditions in the church beliefs. This belief is reflected in our lesson today. The longer he lived and the closer his own death came, he seemed to change some of his beliefs. But his point remains valid. We are to be living each day as if we are in the presence of God in Christ and that the rule of God could come to life at any time. We are to live according to God’s way, shown us in Christ, rather than the way of this world where physical desires rule. The merchandising of Christmas is an example of what he is talking about.

The Gospel is Jesus warning about trying to figure out when this is going to happen. Again in many church traditions it is an important aspect is trying to figure out when the second coming is going to happen. The whole idea is then we can be ready when it does come. This can turn living for salvation into the school game of cramming for the final exam on the night before the test. The point of Christian living is not just being ready for salvation. Rather it is living a life according to God’s teachings and God’s way each and every day of our lives. Advent is a season to prepare ourselves to rededicate our lives for the welcoming of Christ into our lives and rededicating ourselves to living a life dedicated to serving God in Jesus Christ.