

First Week of Advent, November 30, 2008

Mindfulness: Life in the Present Tense

Waiting.

Is there anybody who likes it?

Do we find ourselves saying: “Oh, great! I get to be behind all these wonderful folks here at the spacious and oh-so-architecturally interesting post office! Oh boy!”

Not likely.

After all, we’ve got places to go, people to meet, things to do. Important things.

The Jesus we meet today, as we begin this new liturgical year where we unfold the Gospel of Mark, is also talking to us about places to go, people to meet, things to do. Yes, important things.

What is interesting about this first Gospel of this new “Cycle B” liturgical year (curiously enough, though this is the first reading of the year, it’s not the “beginning of the Gospel according to Mark”—that, we’ll read *next* Sunday) is that Jesus offers a parable not of beginning or initiation, or overtly dynamic action, but of simple waiting and watching. Six simple sentences about being prepared, ending with a stark and simple command: “Watch.”

In Mark’s recounting of the parable of the traveler and the watchful gatekeeper who awaits his return, we are prone to think of Jesus’ admonition: “Be watchful and be ready for you do not know the hour” as a caution to be on guard lest we slacken in our resolve and not be ready to face the judgment of God, whether at our personal death, or at the Parousia, the Second coming of Christ.

But if we focus more on the powerful final word of Jesus, “Watch,” I’m betting we’ll get a far more immanent hit on what he was calling our attention to—presence, mindfulness of the amazing grace of the now.

Perhaps Jesus is telling us “Folks, what are you waiting for? The show *has* started. Aren’t you paying attention? Are you waiting for some curtain to rise before the real action happens? *This* is the real. The real action happens before the curtain is even up—if you are awake enough to see the delightful play that my Father has prepared for you!”

Jesus might continue: “Don’t you see the leading actress? The woman who took “your” parking place as you drove around the church? “I am not behind the curtain, a veiled figment of the future. I was present to you in the groggy faces of your children this morning, in the

frustrating person of your colleague at work last week, in the vulnerability of your isolated neighbor, and the fragileness of the homeless man you saw on the corner. Were you watchful enough to see me?”

Jesus invites us to what in the Tradition of Buddhism is called the practice of mindfulness. The ability to be fully and wholly present where we are, when we are, with whom we are.

“Don’t insult the God who loves you,” he says, “by seeing the car in front of you, or the child, the parent, the lover, the customer, the colleague, the competitor, the repairwoman, as an obstacle to your objective. That car, that person, is there with purpose, just as is your car for the person behind you. Watch! Take it in. Be present, alive, aware of the deep beauty of the moment.”

The phrase “There is no time like the present” might be spoken by Christ, as he understands the timelessness of the Creator, with a slightly different twist, with TWO verbs—“There is no time. *Like* the present. Like it a lot!”



In this Season of Advent, yes, we anticipate, we watch, we wait—but not for a reenactment of that Christmas Day some 2,000 years ago. We watch that we might be ever more aware, ever more conscious, ever more mindful of the constant presence of the timeless God in our lives. A presence not merely commemorated by the crèche we will see in 4 weeks, but enlivened for all time in the living, breathing Incarnate Christ whom we see in every person, and every experience, of our lives.

So yes, let’s take Mark’s words of Jesus to heart as we begin this frenetic pre-Christmas season, keeping our focus, being ready for the surprising revelations of Christ all along the way.

And reverencing the call to mindfulness—deep and abiding awareness of and presence to the blessing of every, and whatever, moment comes our way.

And so, in our music today we hear the plaintive minor chords of longing mixed with the joyful tunes of hope. We sing in our opening chant of “O Come, O Come Emmanuel,” in our Penitential Rite “Let us see your mercy.” in our Psalm, in our voicing of “God, Beyond All Names,” “There Is a Longing,” in “Christ, Circle Round Us” and “The King Shall Come When Morning Dawns,” the timeless cry for reconciliation, for peace, for a deep awareness of God’s presence, a presence which does not suddenly arrive of Christmas day, but, rather, an abiding, love-inviting presence which, with the attentiveness of this season and the celebration of Christmas, we become ever more mindful of with each day.

Yes, there is grace afoot. Let’s watch! And Listen! And let that mindfulness of seeing and attending to God’s compassionate presence in our every interaction bring forth in us all the song of our heart’s, and our world’s, joyful experience of *Emanu-El*, God with us.

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