

**Sermon: St. Peter's Campbell River, BC**  
**November 28, 2009**  
**Advent Sunday**

Advent - the beginning of the Church's new year! It is a time of looking back and a time of looking ahead - a time of cast off the old and putting on the new. It's also a pre-Christmas time - often a hectic time of exams at school, of busy workplace activities heading into year end - all coupled with the bustle of shopping, wrapping, house-cleaning, preparing for guests. It's a time of getting ready for celebrations - making for some an anticipation of a warm time of family and friends and for others, the dread of a lonely time of terrible sadness. So as we stand on this day - Advent Sunday: the beginning of a new church year - what do we see?

The Gospel message for today speaks most significantly to us - the newspapers and the television cry out the message for us each day - the signs and difficulties and perplexities and anxieties: for us now everything is being shaken. Will there ever be peace on earth? Will we ever learn to live together in justice and mercy and peace? Will hatred and war and terrorism ever end? If we look back over the past year in Canada alone: a country of privilege, beauty and peace - from Coast to Coast we have experienced a year of signs, of distress, of confusion and of foreboding - the words spoken by Jesus could have been written today just for us: from Coast to Coast we have people serving in peacekeeping forces in dangerous parts of the world, families have known tragedy and death; we have mourned the disappearance and death of countless numbers of women along the highway of tears and in other parts of our province and country; there have been terrible fires; there have been heavy rain storms and floods; there has been drought, hail, tornadoes and hurricanes, and earthquakes in different parts of our own country. And around the world tremendous devastation by these same acts of violence or natural disaster.

In the midst of all this - we hear the opening sentence echoed in the Gospel - this sentence is the Church's theme song for today: as Jesus says: Look up and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near! - better still in another translation - "Stand up"! - for Love the Lord is on the way!

People look east! The time is near of the crowning of the year.  
Make your house fair as you are able, trim the hearth and set the table  
People look east and sing today, love the guest is on the way - love the Lord is on the way!

It is the same message ringing out of the Old Testament reading for today - Jeremiah's reading comes "Look, the days are coming, says the Lord, when I shall fulfil the promise of happiness I made ... I will cause justice and righteousness to spring up ... and triumph and safety ..."

Advent is a call to us - a call to the Christian community - to live in this painful and often frightening and dangerous in between time with hope - hope that Love the Lord is on the way! Hope born of the knowledge that God is at the heart of human events.

To deal with it we very much need a caring community. Paul's message in 1 Thessalonians becomes an anchor of truth and hope for us. We need a caring community which works at increasing and enriching its love for one another, so that we strengthen one another in wholeness and holiness. Do you know how much power and potential there is in this faith community? Do you realize how much joy God has because of you? It is a joy and a privilege to be here praying with you today. Do you know how special you are - how God longs for you, hopes for you, waits for you?

Hear the words of the Lord oh people!

*I have called you by your very own name; from the very beginning you are mine; I have loved you with an everlasting love; I have searched you out and known you, I know your sitting down and your rising up; I hold you in the palm of my hand and hide you in the shadow of my wings; I keep you as the apple of my eye; I look at you with infinite tenderness and care for you with a care more intimate than that of a mother for her child; I have counted every hair on your head and guided you at every step; wherever you go, I go with you, and wherever you rest, I keep watch; I will give you food that will satisfy all your hunger and drink that will quench all your thirst. I will not hide my face from you. Wherever you are I will be. Nothing can separate us from the love of God in Jesus Christ our Lord.*

Its said again and again in scripture: Hear the words of God - "I am the Lord, I hold you in my love forever"

These words are affirming. This is who you are. This is God's affirmation of us - as very important people - as the Apple of God's eye! And Paul's prayer is that holding on to that, we will increase and enrich our love for each other and for all. We are called to continue to be a caring community - providing an anchor of truth and hope for each other, and for the whole world. In companionship with God the community of St. Peter's in Campbell River is called to be a beacon of hope and anchor - there is great power and potential in this faith community. It will mean awareness that we need each other, that we want the life of our faith community to be rich in relationships within itself as well as active in its outreach to others. It is affirmation and acceptance in the midst of a very diverse community of people with different backgrounds, circumstances, values; affirmation even when there are tough things to be discussed, tough issues to deal with. It is determination to do the hard work of learning to live together with all our differences. It is affirmation and the offer of health, wholeness, healing and justice in our joys and successes together - as well as in our sorrows and failures. It is together - being a faith

community together - that we discover healing in the deepest and most transforming way.

Together - we can Stand Up! and raise our heads for Love the Lord is on the way!

If we are to be faithful to our vocation to love as God loves, we are called, not only to be affirming, tender hearted, but also to be intensely determined to hold firm to life. Such life is characterized by a love that manifests itself in justice, in righteousness. We need each other.

God asks that we become again and again a people who embody an alternative imagination in the midst of and over against the prevailing, inadequate consciousness or conscious-lessness of every age. That in this difficult, often painful, frightening and dangerous in-between time - we reach out in hope that the Lord of Love is on the way, that God is at the heart of human events.

Communities that serve as contexts of transformation - who live out the call to love tenderly - manifest their vocation by serving as environments in which life can come unraveled and re-woven with a new health and life. They are places where new and fragile beginnings are nurtured. They are places of contradiction which continually challenge limited and idolatrous forms for faith, refusing to rest in forms which offer love and justice for some, but not for all. You here in this place - are called to be that kind of a transforming community - to increase and enrich your love for one another and for all.

We are called to be tenderly and fiercely determined to hold firm to life - even as God holds us.

More than any other thing that can be said about Advent - it is for us an opportunity to wait for and to long for O Come O Come Emmanuel - to stand up and raise our heads - for Love the Lord is on the way! Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel shall come to us! It is a time of longing - a time of hope - a new year in which, together, we long grow closer to the heart of God - a new year in which together we indeed come to know ourselves and each other as the Apple of God's eye - and together, know that this world is God's world and that at the heart of this world is the burning love of God - that love, hope and trust - gifts of God for the people of God - are born of the theme song: Stand Up! Raise your heads, for your redemption is drawing near - Stand up! Raise your heads, for Love the Lord is on the way.

Today we should be leaving this church - we who are the beloved of God, the apple of God's eye, folks created in the image and likeness of God - calling out: Make way, make way - the image of God is passing by! Stand up, Raise your heads, for Love the Lord is on the way!

O come divine Messiah, the world in silence waits the day when hope shall sing its triumph and sadness flee away. Dear Saviour haste! Come, come to earth. Dispel the night and show your face, and bid us hail the dawn of grace.