

## First Sunday of Advent (A), 11/28/2010

Good morning. It's a pleasure to begin another Advent season with you. Now that Thanksgiving has passed, the pre-Christmas season is here in earnest at the malls and on TV. Friday was the so-called Black Friday, with shoppers lined up in the early hours of the morning for special sales. A man named JD Dean was the first of 1500 shoppers in line in front of a huge Best Buy store in Myrtle Beach, South Carolina -- he camped out starting Wednesday for the store opening on Friday, as he has for the past three years. He said he didn't even know what was going to be on sale! Isn't that wild? It can be a very crazy season, and I'm sure you'll notice your own examples of crazy things during this Advent season.

But yesterday I came across a video of something much more amazing. On a Saturday just two weeks ago, during a noisy, busy lunchtime in the food court of a Canadian shopping mall near Niagara Falls, a young woman suddenly stood up and began to sing the Halleluiah chorus from Handel's Messiah. "Halleluiah! Halleluiah! Halleluiah! Halleluiah! Hal-le-luiah!" The woman had a brilliant voice, and she caught the attention of everyone around her (her voice was much better than mine!). And no sooner had she finished those few words, than several tables away, someone else, a young man, also stood up and sang – Halleluiah! And one by one, and in small groups, people all over the food court began singing along. For five minutes, the crowd of shoppers was stunned, captivated by the unexpected beauty and joy that cascaded all around them. All ordinary activity was suddenly suspended; even little children stood up on their seats in wonder, their parents holding their hands and savoring what certainly will forever be a priceless memory. It was an unexpected awakening to joy in the midst of the mind-numbing experience that shopping often is.

Today is the beginning of Advent. And while the world around us will get ever more hectic, it is important to remember what this season is all about -- and it is of course about more than shopping; and it is about more than the celebration of an event that took place 2000 years ago. In our gospel today as we begin Advent, Jesus is telling us to stay awake! His emphasis is on preparation and expectation, that his coming will be a repeat performance of what happened in the days of Noah. In other words, many people are NOT going to be expecting His coming, they will be doing the usual things that people do, and will be lulled into a fatal sleep. "But you," He says, "YOU must be prepared, for at an hour you do not expect, the Son of Man will come."

I want us to try to hear what Jesus was saying in a way that will have some real meaning for our own lives this Advent. Obviously he was telling his disciples two things: one, that he was coming again; and two, that they should expect him at any and every moment.

Now, how many of us do that? If we were to take a vote today, I think I know how it would turn out. If I were to ask how many of you believe that Christ is coming again, the vote would be overwhelming, maybe unanimous. Our Christian faith teaches that Christ will someday come again, although most of us probably believe that in a general sort of a way. But if I were to ask how many of you expect his coming TODAY....that would be another matter. I seriously doubt that anyone here expects the coming of Christ today, in the sense that we usually interpret that.

You know what we expect today? Most of us probably expect at typical Sunday afternoon. We will go home for lunch, then perhaps go out for a little shopping, or sit down to watch a football game, or maybe read a book, or get on the computer. We may get together with friends or relatives. We may have chores, or homework. We probably expect to go to bed at a usual time, and get up tomorrow morning.

In all honesty, isn't that or something like that what most of us expect? And in all probability, that IS what most of us are going to do. Does it mean that we are disobeying Christ by planning and living our lives in a normal, daily fashion? Not at all. I do not believe that Jesus was telling his first disciples to be constantly expecting the end of the world, though that is what "future coming" means in the minds of many. A lot of people associate the Second Coming with the end of the world, and the end of everyday life as we know it.

And they are not wrong...but this morning I encourage you to understand Advent in a way that has meaning for our life here and now. The coming of Jesus into the world should be something more than a memory of the past 2000 years ago, or a distant hope somewhere in the general future. For you and for me, it should be a present reality. Not just history or prophesy, but personal experience - that is what the coming of Christ should mean to us.

And I believe THAT is what Jesus was telling his disciples. He said, "The Son of Man is coming at the time you least expect him." Okay, when do we least expect him? Not back in the past; we DO believe that he actually came into the world. Not out in the future; we DO believe that someday he will visibly, bodily return to the earth.

No, the time that we least expect him is today. So LOOK FOR HIM today, that's when he said he was coming! But don't look for him in the clouds. He is most likely to be found among those who need him. Look for him on the streets, among the homeless. Look for him by the bed of a sick friend. Look for him close by a young person who is in trouble at school, or at home, or with the law. Or look for him in the face of a child -- God's Kingdom belongs to the children. Look for him in the eyes of a beloved spouse -- Christ is alive today in your marriage. To see Jesus, we have to look for him, we have to be alert and notice those around us; we have to expect to see him.

Especially in this busy, crazy world, and this busy, crazy season that is now upon us. Jesus does not often arrive in a few glorious moments of serendipity that joyfully break into our consciousness, like hearing Handel's Messiah in a shopping mall. To develop the ability to see Him, we need to cultivate a sense of silence. Silence is something that our modern culture does NOT lift up as a value -- that's why we aren't as good about it as we should be. Silence will be particularly difficult in our culture over the next few weeks.

But silence IS something that we are good at here. Advent is the **perfect** prescription for the busyness of our lives. And our Eucharist is all about being aware of the presence of Jesus.

Deacon Denny Duffell