

Isaiah 2: 1-5
Matthew 24: 36-44
Creekside COB
December 2, 2007
The First Sunday in Advent

“Must God Make All Things New?”

Must God make all things new? The answer to this question is a resounding, “YES!” God is not the guardian of the status quo. God does not endorse the present arrangements, no matter how good the arrangements may be, for they are ours, not God’s. God will not settle for business as usual or anything less than the fulfillment of God’s goals for the world. Regardless how much we want life to be stable, manageable, and predictable, God has something new in the works.

Must God make all things new? The answer is an emphatic, unequivocal, indisputable “YES!” But don’t take my word for it. Listen to Isaiah: *Remember not the former things. Don’t consider the things of old. Behold, I am doing a new thing* (43:18-19).

Listen to Jeremiah: *Behold, the days will come, says the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel* (31: 33-34). Listen to Ezekiel: *Thus says the Lord God, I will give them a new heart, and I will put a new spirit within them* (11: 19). Listen again to Isaiah: *I create new heavens and a new earth. For the past shall be forgotten and never come to mind* (65: 16).

Listen to the apostle Paul: *Therefore if any one is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, all things have become new* (5: 17).

Listen to Jesus: No one puts new wine into old wineskins; if it is, the skin bursts and the wine is spilled; but new wine is put into new wineskins. (Mt. 9: 16-17).

Listen to the vision of John in Revelation: *Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away-- the former things have passed away. Behold, I make all things new. (Rev. 21: 1-5).*

These are God's winsome promises. They appeal to something within us that wants fresh starts, second chances, and new possibilities. They appeal to that part of us that wants freed from the bondage of "*what is*" to grasp "*what can be.*" And we are still waiting.

You don't have to be old to know that "old ways" don't give a wide birth to the new. Young men and women enter the work force with their college degrees and lots of enthusiasm. They are eager to contribute and make a positive impact, but they meet resistance from those who say, "It's not the way we do things." A fresh-from-seminary pastor eagerly accepts the call to her first church. She is ready to stake a claim for God's Kingdom. She wants to build enthusiasm for spreading the good news of Jesus' light and love. But no sooner does she arrange her study than a church leader puts a hand on her shoulder and says, "Your idealism is commendable. It *could* work—in an ideal world. But let's be realistic. This is the church, honey, not seminary. You just take care of our flock, count the blades of grass in the church lawn each year, and we'll all be fine."

There is an abundance of biblical promises that God will erase the world's tired, old worn-out ways and replace them all with something we can scarcely imagine. But there is also a voice of dissent in scripture that suggests making peace with life as it is. Those who discourage "rocking the boat" point to the dismal observations of Ecclesiastes:

One generation comes and goes—the next one arrives, but nothing changes.

The sun goes up and the sun goes down, then does it again, and again.

The wind blows south and north, but never blows itself out. Rivers keep flowing to the same old place, then start all over and do it again.

What was will be again, what happened will happen again.

***Does someone cry out, “Hey, this is new”?
Don’t get excited—it’s the same old story.
There is nothing new under the sun.***

Back in the 70’s Joni Mitchell wrote a beautiful but sad song that echoes Ecclesiastes’ outlook.

***Yesterday a child came out to wonder
Caught a dragonfly inside a jar
Fearful when the sky was full of thunder
And tearful at the falling of a star
Then the child moved ten times round the seasons
Skated over ten clear frozen streams
Words like, when youre older, must appease him
And promises of someday make his dreams
And the seasons they go round and round
And the painted ponies go up and dawn
Were captive on the carousel of time
We cant return we con only look behind
From where we came
And go round and round and round
In the circle game.***

***Sixteen springs and sixteen summers gone now
Cartwheels turn to car wheels thru the town
And they tell him,
Take your time, it wont be long now
Till you drag your feet to slow the circles down.***

***So the years spin by and now the boy is twenty
Though his dreams have lost some grandeur
Coming true
There’ll be new dreams, maybe better dreams and plenty
Before the last revolving year is through.
And the seasons they go round and round
And the painted ponies go up and down
Were captive on the carousel of time***

*We cant return, we can only look behind
From where we came
And go round and round and round
In the circle game*

“The Circle Game” by Joni Mitchell

Advent is the season for us to tell the world, “We know better.” As the days of December grow longer and darker, we celebrate the light that shines in the darkness. While the world shops and parties through Christmas, trying to get away from the stifling sameness of life, we say there is something new under the sun—the Son born under a star. We have the audacity to believe that God came to us in flesh and blood, and that of all the means available at God’s disposal to come into the world, God chose a cattle stall in an insignificant podunk town.

Advent is time for worship to shake some spiritual sense into us. Life as we now know it will not remain the same. Last Saturday at 4:00 p.m. I had two grandchildren. Gary took a picture a half hour later and there I was married with eight grandchildren! The world will not stay the same because the world isn’t what it’s supposed to be.

Imagine a phone call to the White House from General Patraeus in Iraq. “Mr. President, we have a serious problem. This morning at 00:60 hours our troops forgot everything we taught them. They can’t remember how to fire their rifles. Our pilots can’t remember how to use their weapon systems. The insurgency has forgotten how to fight, too. The situation is grave, sir. Our troops want to work with the insurgents to rebuild Baghdad. From my window I’m watching a soccer game between the Marines and Al-Quida. How should we precede, Mr. President?”

... and they shall beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more (Isaiah 2: 4).

Is it too hard to imagine? There is no sign on the horizon that swords, rifles, or Bradley tanks will be melted down and turned

into plows. But by faith we look beyond the horizon to the new thing God has in store for the world. We have no experience with which God's new advent can compare. Matthew's images are strange and distressing—the moon will grow dark, the Big Dipper will fall from the sky, the powers of heaven and earth will be shaken. People will be about their business as usual—unsuspecting, and inattentive. Then the Lord will come like a thief in the night.

Advent is our wake-up call to do more than service ourselves and get right with God just to save our skins. There's more to life and more in store for the world than we realize which is why Jesus says, "Pay attention!"

There is a moving scene from Thornton Wilder's play, *Our Town*. The central character, Emily has died at the young age of 26. She asks the stage manager if he could grant her a wish. "I want to return for a brief visit with my family," she says. He grants her wish—with one condition. She has to choose the least important day in her life, so she decides to return on her twelfth birthday. When she returns she is immediately distressed. Her father is obsessed with business problems and her mother is preoccupied with her kitchen duties. Emily shouts, "Oh Mama, just look at me one minute as though you really saw me. Mama, 14 years have gone by and I'm dead! Unable to break her parents out of their concerns, Emily sobs:

"We don't have time to look at one another... Goodbye, world! , ... Goodbye Mama and Papa, ... Oh earth, you're too wonderful for anybody to realize you! Do any human beings ever realize life while they live it—every, every minute?"

If only we will pay attention and really see each other and not "see through" each other. If only we will wake up and realize life while we live it -- living it as God wants, instead of going around in circles chasing the wrong things and consuming and boring ourselves to death.

So wake up! He's coming at an hour you do not expect. Then perhaps we will live in God's new world, even while we're in the midst of the old one.