

**“We have found him of whom Moses in the law, and the prophets, did write, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph.” (St. John 1.45)**

Today is our liturgical equivalent of New Year’s Eve. We are sitting at the end of the long road of the last year, and next week we will turn back all our lectionaries and calendars to start the journey all over again. But what have we learned? What will be our takeaway from another year of the Lord’s time? As I have explained before (and you can see in the bulletin column), the liturgical year is often depicted as a circle. We start at Advent, go through the life of Christ – his birth, raising, temptation, teaching, passion, death, resurrection, ascension, and sending of the Spirit – and then we round out the latter half of the year learning more about Jesus, more about God. This year, the Trinity season, today included, has been 25 weeks long: one week shy of a perfect half-year of 26. Or, if we count from Pentecost, it has been 26. For half the year, we experience Jesus grow; and for the other half of the year, we ourselves grow. This is part of the symbolism for the colour green we’ve been seeing in the church for the last 26 weeks – it is a colour of growth – and it symbolizes our own growth just as much as it reminds us of the green grass, plants, and trees we find outside during the Northern Hemisphere’s summer.

The strength of the church calendar, as we have it, is that we hear the same things year after year. We hear the same lessons, the same miracles, and experience the same events – and this can only help to reinforce our learning each time. Our context informs how we each interpret scripture, and each year our context changes. This means that even if we have the benefit of reading the same passage of scripture every year for 70 years, we are likely to experience at least small parts of it in 70 different ways. This is a gift we have been given: that Scripture continues to speak to us even when we think we’ve read it or heard it all.

So, for this year’s interpretation, I find that our lessons tie together a lot of the key themes we’ve been working on over the last number of weeks and wrap them up rather nicely with an integrating bow.

Take our Old Testament lesson, for example, from Jeremiah the prophet. Jeremiah, though speaking to an audience of exiled Jews in captivity in Babylon, is foretelling the coming Messiah as *the* righteous king who will sit on the throne of David forever. This new king shall restore the divided people to his kingdom; he shall bring peace. This act of restoration will be so great that it will overshadow even the story of the Exodus, when God delivered his people out of slavery in Egypt. Because all that the new king does will be to God’s glory, for his name will be “the Lord our Righteousness” – or in the Hebrew, *Jehovah Tsidkenu*. (This was simultaneously a promise of the greatness of the promised king, and a swipe at the current king who was merely a puppet for the Babylonians – Zedekiah – whose name means the Lord *my* Righteousness.) But this new king will point to God and his mighty acts. This lesson, for us, might exemplify that we have learned that Jesus is the righteous king: he is the one who brings us to God.

Our Epistle from St. Paul’s letter to the Colossians picked up where we left off last week, with St. Paul singing the praises of Jesus to the Colossians. But here, specifically, Paul tells us how Jesus is pre-eminent in Creation. “...all things were created through him and for him. And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together” (Col. 1.16-17). Jesus was there at the centre of creation, Paul says. But if you recall the story of creation from Genesis, you will remember *who* did the creating: God. So, Paul, here, is overtly calling Jesus divine. In fact, he takes it a step further and says, “for in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross” (Col. 1.19-20). Jesus the man contained the fullness of God, and the mission was to restore creation back to its intended relationship with God (“to reconcile to himself all things”), and he achieved this peace through the blood of his cross. His sacrifice which forms the turning point, the *crux*, for all of human and cosmic history – where the trajectory of the world is pulled from a nosedive towards sin and death and instead put on a trajectory towards everlasting life. The preeminence of Christ, his unity in the Godhead, the headship of the Church, are all here affirmed by Paul and are also good summaries of what we have been hearing all summer. Jesus is Lord, and in him is the fullness of God.

I see these two lessons as doing a lot of hard thinking for us, summarizing a great deal of what we have been praying, learning, and reading. But the cloudiness of all this theologizing, this learning about God, seems to give way when I read the Gospel like clouds parting to reveal a peaceful sky: Jesus the promised king is here presented in calmness, calling followers to him. John the Baptist proclaims him to be the Lamb of God, and sends his own followers to Jesus, and Jesus asks them to accompany him. The following grows, with whispers of having found the Messiah bouncing between them in excitement for this is “him of whom Moses in the law, and the prophets did write, Jesus of Nazareth.”

But, I ask: why do we have this story of the beginning of Jesus’ ministry here at the end of our liturgical year? Why do we get the call of the first disciples as the closing act to a whole year’s cycle of worship? I think it is for a few reasons. Firstly, it acts as a summary or even as the climax to all the learning we have been doing since June: we have been constantly pointed towards Jesus, and here he is. This is the one, clearly in view, who is the fulfillment of the prophecies, the one who is wholly divine and wholly human. This is the saviour of the world, walking among us. The *Lord our Righteousness* among the people. And second, Jesus is inviting us to come on the journey of discovery again: to restart the liturgical year, to join him on the road towards the cross just as we are about to begin the season of anticipation of his coming again to the world.

“The Lord our Righteousness’, prophesied by Jeremiah (B.C.P., p.259), sums up the season of Trinity and turns us toward Advent. The gospel of this Sunday concludes with the finding of the Righteous One: ‘We have found him of whom Moses in the law, and the prophets did write, Jesus of Nazareth.’ This righteousness is what we have sought in Trinity season through the practice of Christian virtue. By following daily the teaching and example of Jesus and by the nourishing grace of the Holy Spirit, we have endeavoured to grow up in the Righteous Branch, and so to ‘plenteously bring forth the fruit of good works.’”<sup>1</sup>

Today is a summary, a pivot, and an invitation. We are turning our focus sharply towards Advent, but we are called to take all that we have learned along the way *with us* – not to leave it behind. We want to be able to take all that we have learned, all of our growth, along for the journey to the cross again, and we are extended the hand of Jesus in invitation to follow him, to pick up where we are leaving off. Of course this is likely familiar territory, and we can be tempted to let it go by in slide, but rather than be passive, our Collect asks God to *stir us!* Rouse us! Shake us! Wake us up so that we might be alert, ready, and able to meet the task that is set before us as we await Christ’s second coming. Rather than fall asleep into the repetitiveness, we pray that God makes us restless and awake that we might follow Jesus with all we have to offer. That we not be caught asleep instead of watching when Christ does return.

I do, actually, like the emphasis the new calendars place on today: calling it “the Reign of Christ” – a celebration of Christ’s eternal kingship where, like we are told in the Epistle to the Hebrews, Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever (13.8). It is an emphasis that Christ’s reign as the Davidic king does not end, that he rules all time and all creation, and that when everything in our world seems lost, he is still in control. Jeremiah describes the righteous branch, Jesus is this righteous branch whose kingdom never ends and whose rule is forever. Paul writes, “He is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent” (Col. 1.18). May we, in our observance of the church’s year which has been practiced for two millennia, realize that our time is sanctified by Christ – it is made holy by him – that we are in *his* time, and that he is the true king of our hearts and our lives. And may he stir up our hearts and wills that we might accept, live, and proclaim his salvation to the whole world; that we might bring forth the fruit of good works, and be plenteously rewarded in the world to come. And may we continue to grow in the knowledge and love of God and of his son, Jesus Christ our Lord.

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<sup>1</sup> Adapted from “The Sunday Next before Advent,” in *COMMON PRAYER: A Commentary on the Prayer Book Lectionary Volume 1: Sunday Next Before Advent to Epiphany VI* (St. Peter Publications: Charlottetown)