

Homily, St. Andrew's - 8:00am  
Sunday, November 30, 2014  
Advent 1 (BCP) Romans 13:11-14

Let us pray: May the words of my mouth and the meditations of all our hearts be ever more acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our Rock and our Redeemer.

There's a beautiful and gentle jazz tune, "Narrow Daylight," that I often think of this time of year. The song begins: "Narrow daylight; entered my room; shining hours were brief; winter is over; summer is near; are we stronger than we believe?" Other than just the loveliness of it, I've long pondered over the irony of the lyrics. Winter is the time of narrow daylight, when shining hours are brief and yet the song declares the moment of narrow daylight as the time when winter is over, summer is near. This disjuncture in the lyrics along with the gentle beauty of the music seems to fit this time of the church year when, in the midst of the deepening darkness that accompanies the plunging temperatures, we look with expectant hope for a miracle of light and life. Like the declaration of the song: winter is over, summer is near - the season of Advent, beginning today, celebrates the hope that though the darkness continues to grow, light is coming, and we are called to prepare.

In the second half of our epistle reading today, Paul writes an urgent appeal to the Romans to prepare: "... you know what time it is, how it is now the moment for you to wake from sleep." Paul's call to 'wake from sleep' echoes a familiar image from early Christianity, including some of Jesus' parables. Think of the Parable of the 10 bridesmaids and the fate of the 5 foolish bridesmaids who neglect to bring extra oil for their lamps. When the groom is late and everyone falls asleep, the lamps of the foolish go out for lack of oil. The 5 wise bridesmaids, however, bring extra oil and so when they wake from their slumber, they are quickly ready to go out to meet the groom. Scripture tells us over and over that God comes suddenly and unexpectedly, and that we need to get ready, we need to be prepared, for the unexpected arrival. The call isn't to know the mind of God, or to predict the future... the call is to live in the expectant hope of the coming of day.

"... now is the moment for you to wake from sleep..." Paul urges his readers. Before the sun has risen, before the angel announces a miracle, before we even know what God is up to, now is the time to get ready. While the daylight is still narrow, now is the time... The call to wake in the pre-dawn hours is a call to a most important spiritual practice and the spiritual practice highlighted most in Advent. It is a call to "pay attention," so that we don't miss God's arrival in the world, and in our lives. The need for an attentive spirituality at this time of year is, I suspect, more challenging today than it was in Paul's day. In the flurry of Christmas shopping and baking, in the midst of parties and all manner of visiting with family and friends, in the crush of traffic and the stress of snowy, icy roads, how are we to find peace and calm enough to pay attention for God? It is the question, the challenge, we face every year at this time.

Before offering an answer to that question, Paul first offers the motivation: "For salvation is nearer to us now than when we became believers; the night is far gone, the day is near." Paul's hope, like ours, is in holding on to the belief that each day God has not come... every hour of waiting, is one hour closer to fulfillment. And every moment of waiting gives us one more moment when we can be preparing for God's imminent yet unexpected arrival. The night is far gone, the day is near... salvation is just around the next corner.

The strength that such expectant hope gives us can be remarkable. The hope of "just

around the next corner” and “only a few more minutes... a few more steps” is one of the ways we encouraged one another along the Inca Trail. We couldn't think of another huge, mountain staircase or several hours of walking... so we would tell each other that we were almost there... Just a few more steps... We're closer now than when we set out this morning... we're nearer now than we were down there... the destination is near. Salvation is close at hand.

And so, Paul advises, act as people of the day. Live as though it were light, even if the darkness seems too full. Live with honour, as in the day, instead of escaping in the drink and foolishness of the night. Don't just follow every impulse and desire, but live with intent and integrity and authenticity... even through the busy-ness! Live with the confidence of one who knows salvation is near. For, if we're paying attention, we can feel the gentle rays of narrow daylight entering the room, and know the hope that the day of God's arrival is near.