

“Homo Delecto” by Peter Bankson

16 December 2012

Third Sunday of Advent

INTRODUCTION

As I've pondered this Advent season, and our theme of "Promise (as/at/in/of/through) the end of the world," has been a time of waiting. But what are we waiting for? What does the coming of Christ mean THIS TIME?

I've been waiting for change, praying that we could all see that the world is becoming a better place, more kind, more caring, more loving. Personally, I've been wrestling with my deeply rooted commitment to solving problems, and how often that gets in the way of nurturing relationships. This week I was given, uninvited, a fresh look at the challenge. As I moved a bunch of stuff out of an upstairs room so that the cracked walls caused by Hurricane Sandy could be restored I scanned and sorted five years' worth of spiritual reports, and saw that I've been wrestling with this tension between "results" and "relationships" for AT LEAST those five years! It was pretty clear that I'm still measuring myself by how much I do rather than whether I can love. But this time I realized that I may not have been seeing quite clearly what I've been waiting for. In many ways I've been waiting for others to change, for you to change, for THEM to change. But maybe the change that is gestating this Advent season is a change in ME.

What would it take, I've wondered, for me to let myself be

changed? As I looked at Brenda's e-mail with our Advent practice for this week, it didn't take very long for me to start feeling uncomfortable and alone, uncomfortable enough that I quickly shifted from "ME" to "WE:" What would it mean if WE let ourselves be changed, to be more generous, to be more loving?

What is the Good News that we are awaiting in Advent?

In the Advent reflection for this week, Brenda made the a point that had been emerging inside me. It's a good place for me to start. She said:

"In the Luke passage for this week (Luke 3:7-18) John the Baptist warns the people that they can't just claim to be related to Abraham and think that will save them, instead he asks that they share their abundance with others, charge only the taxes that are really owed and be satisfied with their pay. In his letter to the Philippians, Paul encourages his readers to be gentle with one another, and to ask God for what they want with a thankful heart. It seems that part of the Good News is being proactive and to be aware of how your actions and your contributions can affect the world.

"We cannot rely on our heritage, or the fact that we vote for those in government that we feel will best champion our values. Instead if we want generosity in others we need to be generous. If we want people to be satisfied with what they have then we need to be satisfied with what we have. If we want to be treated gently we must treat others gently." And on it goes....

She invited us to offer this gift to the world during this third week in Advent:

"I will be aware of my expectations for others and will work toward meeting those same expectations in myself."

She gave us some questions for reflection:

Does my disappointment when others don't meet my expectations keep me from meeting those same expectations in myself? Does it become a "...if they aren't doing it why should I" equation?

- Does expecting the same from myself as I expect from others, help me become more empathetic with those who don't meet my expectations?

What kind of a change would it take for us – for ALL of us – to become more like Jesus, more loving? What difference would it make for all of us, for the planet, if "we" – that is ALL OF US HUMANS – became more loving?

The end is near. It's time for a change!

After 5,125 years, the Mayan calendar comes to an end this week. Oh, I know that archaeologists and most historians don't see this as the end of the world in the same way our scripture describes, with "Signs in the sun, the moon, and the stars, and on the earth distress among nations confused by the roaring of the sea and the waves." (Luke 21:25)

NASA has posted a web site full of evidence that there's no astronomical reason to expect the world to end, even if some in the press are capitalizing on the excitement of the doom & gloom scenario. Hotels near Chichen Itza on the Yucatan Peninsula in Mexico are sold out this week, as revelers hope to do their last partying as the dark planet Nibiru descends like a big brother of the shining orb descending on Times Square in New York City every New Year's Eve. I'm pretty sure those revelers will have to live with their hangovers.

The end of the earth may not be all that near, but frankly, given the way things are these days, I could use a change. The "end of the world as we've known it" might include some welcome changes. I'd vote for –

- * Fewer loaded handguns and automatic rifles in the hands of angry, mentally ill people, and fewer elementary school children shot to death;
- * Less frenzied pressure for consumption to stimulate economic growth;
- * The end of wars to defend “our” peace;
- * Wages and working conditions that benefit everyone, including those who labor for an hourly wage;
- * Meaningful work for all, work that contributes to the common good, and a way for each to find a place where they can contribute.

These may be distant dreams, but we have some reassurance from Paul in our Epistle for this week:

Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice. Let your gentleness be known to everyone. The Lord is near. Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

It's a tall order. A long time ago (in 1984, to be precise) I was moved by the tension of the times to write a poem. I was working at Communities In Schools, trying to help build local groups of committed people who cared enough about the future of their communities to help the children who were growing up to be the citizens of the future. I ran across it last weekend while I was leading the silent retreat for Dayspring Church. It seemed to speak to where we are today, so I tinkered with it just a bit. It begins with a reference to one of my favorites from Robert Frost:

They cannot scare me with their empty spaces

*Between stars on stars where no human race is.
I have it in me so much nearer home
To scare myself with my own desert places.*

“Desert Places” Robert Frost

The poem is called “Peace with Justice.”

The world is closing in
around us.
More people than there’s room for,
wanting more of
everything
until the very globe
groans
from the
wrappers of their getting.

Desert places, where the
emptiness
reminds us of how small we
are,
retreat before the concrete
truck.

another with suspicion.

We look at one

your greed

I wonder if

you do not need

for what I know

getting

will stop my

have an inborn right to.

what I know I

And there's THEM.

ready,

THEY want the world

their point,

to go their way

and seem quite

detonate enough

just to make

to mutilate or

fear.

to escalate the

Free enterprise

has taught us something

terribly important:

to go around,
measure
little bit,
anything away,
think you have enough.

There is not enough
but I can have full
if I help you get a
keep THEM from taking
and make you

As I've thought about this image of fighting for my "rights" to stuff, I've wondered about the reference to "them." The media tell me who "Them" is for me, all those who are different from me. But as a member of this little family of faith, I have a different understanding: each of is unique, so therefore we're ALL different. So the only reason someone is "Them" is because I don't know them ... yet.

And from the other perspective, to whom am I that "THEM?" And what might I do about that, to usher in the realm of God. Is there some change of heart that might just get the ball rolling?

And if that change of heart went viral, might that not look like the end of the world – at least the end of the world as we've known it?

It seems to me that, with all the hype around the end of the world (as we've known it) the time might be right for something really new to emerge, some new way of being "Human." "Homo Sapiens" is the "judicious human," the wise one, the calculating being – the judging animal.

Could I imagine being on the threshold of a new age where our species becomes the known for love rather than judgment? Might we be waiting, in this Advent season, for the emergence of “Homo Conciliatus,” or “Homo Delecto,” the Favorably Inclined Human, the Source of Delight? Might that be what marks the new age?

What if we are called to be Homo Delecto?

Our Christian tradition is full of examples, invitations and exhortations to be more loving:

** We're assured over and over again in Scripture that God is Love!*

** This week Paul counsels us to “Let your gentleness be known to everyone. Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.”*

In this new age, an age where we let love be our guide, the familiar lines of First Corinthians 13 might be a good start for a renewed covenant with God:

“If I speak in the tongues of mortals and of angels, but do not have love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. If I give away all my possessions, and if I hand over my body so that I may boast, but do not have love, I gain nothing.

Love is patient; love is kind; love is not envious or boastful or arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice in

wrongdoing, but rejoices in the truth. It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

Love never ends. But as for prophecies, they will come to an end; as for tongues, they will cease; as for knowledge, it will come to an end. For we know only in part, and we prophesy only in part; but when the complete comes, the partial will come to an end. When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child; when I became an adult, I put an end to childish ways. For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then we will see face to face. Now I know only in part; then I will know fully, even as I have been fully known. And now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; and the greatest of these is love.

A covenant, and the promise that we'd have some help living it out as we celebrate the emergence of a new kind of being, modeled after Jesus, incarnating God as love: Homo Delecto. It won't be easy, and we probably won't get it completely right for a long time. But we're not alone. Last week in the SCL class David had us read from the prophets, and I ran across this wonderful image from Isaiah 41:13:

For I, the LORD your God,

hold your right hand;

it is I who say to you, "Do not fear,

I will help you."

CLOSING

So as we watch for the coming of Christ this week, for the dawn of a new age, keep your eyes peeled for signs of love and let others know where to find it. Here's the way my old poem turns toward the coming age as it ends:

When I've decided that I have
enough,
some Spirit wind
brings rain clouds on my inner
spaces,
makes the desert bloom
with flowers I can give
away,
and grants me time to
care
if even THEY have flowers on
their table.
What is enough? What does it
take
to fill your life with
meaning,
satisfaction,
and the love to
live again another day?

As I've begun to watch more closely I've seen glimpses of how, when I can risk trying to nurture a relationship, more often than not solutions emerge from the relationship that are much more creative than anything I had imagined. If I can "let go and let God," wonderful things can happen.

God is Love. Homo Delecto, the Favorably Inclined Human, the Source of Delight, could be the stewards of a new age, an age when WE – all of us human inhabitants living on this crowded planet – when WE learn how to let God write the Good News on our hearts. So raise your right hand and let God help us keep turning from “ME” toward an ever-growing “WE.”

Amen.