

Sermon Bytes: Preparing for the Unexpected

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I begin today with a confession and an observation

First of all a confession: I am an avowed tea granny. Those who frequent the halls of Crossroads will see me heading towards the kitchen to put on the kettle to get a cup of my favorite brew.

Secondly, an observation: My mother was wrong. She used to say that a watched pot never boils. And I guess she was not alone in that. But I have learned that eventually, with enough patience, it does. Otherwise I would return to my office sans cuppa, more often than I do. When the phone rings, or I get into a conversation, or as is too often the case, I simply forget why I went into the kitchen in the first place

Every year Advent begins with a scripture, usually from near the end of Jesus' life, that calls us to remember to be prepared, to be ready, to be watching. But in reality, how can we be prepared? Utterly confounding events erase all our expectations, and with them all our preparations. According to the old adage – you cannot prepare for what you did not imagine. To give you a for instance: Most of us are of an age that we can remember when President Kennedy was assassinated, and how the world changed after that. It was something beyond the imagination, and so the whole world was unprepared.

Now a little interesting twist on the gospel lesson. It not only asks us to be prepared, which we more than likely assume that means what is going to happen. But the tense is the present. So not what is going to happen but what is already happening around us. To read the signs and portents, and to be ready for the advent of God in our midst.

Harvey Cox, Emeritus Professor of theology at Harvard, has a new book out, called *The Market As God* - an exploration of the conquest of the values of all our human institutions by the values of the global consumer economy. Cox has read the tea leaves of history and modern life and says that now is the time to wage a serious battle for the soul of this world.

The book happened to be published before the US election, which saw the blatant worship of power and wealth and a disturbing display of disdain for the poor and the outcast – who, in the parlance of the President Elect, are all losers. Where the gospel honors the suffering of all afflicted people, the President elect is openly scornful of anyone he does not deemed a winner.

Jesus and the prophets before him spoke of a time when the world would be turned upside down. A time when the Kingdom of God, with its emphasis on justice and sharing and the wellbeing of all, would come upon the people. It was something that Isaiah dreamed of when he spoke of the city of Zion which, while it was certainly related to Jerusalem, was also different – A City on A Hill. A beacon of the grace and the

goodness of God. A place where all people were welcomed, regardless of race and creed and colour. Where all would share the abundance under the reign of the sovereignty and the justice of God

The coming Kingdom would, according to the prophets, would upend market values. So say the prophets, Jesus, and his constantly amazed disciples. And the time would come when swords would be turned into plowshares, and the arts of war would be practiced no more. Yet if we are discouraged when we look at our current situation. We must remember Isaiah was writing to a city under siege, and Jesus - The Christmas Child - was born into just such a time. The census had been ordered, to try to control migrating minorities and make sure they paid their taxes. And an army was sent out to destroy the Christ Child. And Matthew was writing to the early church which was living in the aftermath of the destruction of Jerusalem.

Once again Advent comes in a time of turmoil. A time when no one is sure what is up and what will happen next. The Status quo has been shaken and no one is sure what will happen next. But it is not looking like it will be the dawning of a new age of enlightenment.

In the wildness of our times, we struggle to keep ahead of the violence and out of harm's way, holding onto the thought that an earth-changing moment is coming - a God-struck moment, when lowly messengers, sheep, grizzled shepherds, a star, and the motley assortment of the rest of us, will start spreading the news that the good News of the Kingdom of Hope is upon us, and that wealth and power are no longer the barometers of winners. When we realize that power is no longer keeps us safe. That peace does not emerge from armies, but from the power of our God who calls us to build a kingdom – a community of love and justice

That if we change the way we see this world, we can hold even empires accountable, and we can make them change. As Henry Miller once said: "Our destination is never a place, but always a new way of looking at things".

And isn't that what Advent is all about- changing the way we look at our world

Keep your eyes open, for you may see amazing things, and angels may appear. And from there, anything can happen