

Happy Anniversary and Happy New Year

Sunday, Nov 27th 2011 - Advent 1

Church of the Advent, Colwood and Langford BC

on the occasion of our 25th year of ministry in the present building

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What people do at anniversaries

- They assemble
- They tell funny, sometimes embarrassing stories
- They remember together
- They note the passage of time and its affects
- They wonder about the next anniversary
- **In the best circumstances, they consider the future, standing in the present, with a memory of the past**

CONSIDER COTA

1. The past will be well described by Graham and others **in the hall**
2. The **future is accessed through the present**. Here we are in Advent season which has us consider the coming of Christ as Lord of the cosmos
3. In the **Eucharistic prayer** itself

“Christ has died, Christ is risen, Christ will come again”

The other night, roused by insomnia, I read from Willa Cather, *Death Comes to the Archbishop*, of a discussion between a missionary Roman Catholic archbishop and his junior vicar, during the pioneer days of New Mexico, where there had been a miraculous apparition:

The miracles of the church seem to me to rest not so much upon faces or voices or healing power coming suddenly near to us from afar off, but **upon our perceptions being made finer** so that for a moment **our eyes can see and our ears can hear what is there about us always.**

What is “there about us” today? What will be “there about us” 25 years down the road?

1. I for one, shall be retired, whoo-hoo! That’s definite):
2. Will this very building exist right here in 25 years time?
3. What will be the style and complement of its leadership?
4. Will Taylor Gossman stand with her child to light the first Advent candle?
5. How will this local Anglican faith community connect with the local social and political community
6. Speaking of the latter, will Colwood have sewers and Stu Young still be Langford’s mayor? In both cases, never say NEVER!

Two voices (recent Anglican journal) join my thoughts at this point:

Mark MacDonald is national indigenous bishop of the Anglican Church of Canada. Of “the future of church’ he writes:

The service the physical church provides is not insignificant. *Many in modern society are looking for ways to fill the void of the relatively smaller role that the church plays in contemporary life.*

Our work must focus on **making disciples and building the networks** capable of supporting them. We should concentrate on maintaining the capacity for the *formation, connection and communion of disciples* as a matter of first importance.

Dr. Gary Nicolosi, in an uncharacteristically gentle mood, describes the local church as:

... (Y)our parish church—the place where you worship God, meet friends, serve others and experience the overwhelming, abundant love of Jesus in your life.

... (B)eing a Christian without the church is impossible, for where, except in the church, can you receive the body and blood of Christ in the Eucharist, or hear pronounced the forgiveness of your sins, or find support in sickness, or comfort in dying, or help in understanding the Bible, or navigating all the ups and downs of life?

It was the English Jesuit John Coventry who said that the church is a **community of resurrection—a place where sin and death never have the last word**. We all need strength for the journey, hope for living and assurance that at the heart of the universe is not a black hole but the ever-present, everliving love of God.

It is timely and good to assess the role of any parish church, even our parish church in nurturing each other. Personally, and this is a biased view, I think we should be thankful for the Church of the Advent as we find it today. I do travel a bit, and can say with some honesty and authority, that there's options out there, and this one isn't bad by comparison.

So let us be thankful for the vision and determination of those who have gone before us, at St. Matthews, at St. John's, through the transitions and the construction, the funding and the settling in. It wasn't easy, it wasn't problem free.

And lets be thankful for those who express vision and exercise leadership right here, right now. In our day, different things remain uneasy, often problematic, uncertain, and risky. Such is the life of the Gospel for those with sufficient courage to carry it and announce it. For we engage many of whom Isaiah wrote, centuries ago:

“There is no one who calls on your name
or attempts to take hold of you”

Thankfully, many find their way through our doors, sometimes for a long time, in other cases, more briefly, who can say with Paul:

“God is faithful, by him you were called into the fellowship of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.”

I share these thoughts on the First Sunday of Advent, a season when we consider our future, together. The imagery of today's Gospel is unsettling, as everything we have counted on in the past seems

destined to collapse as “even the powers in the heavens will be shaken.” But God’s Word will survive all rivals, where “heaven and earth will pass away, but (God’s) words will never disappear.”

The challenge for us, as individuals and as a congregation, is to keep awake, to exercise a disciplined religious vigil, to speak the truth in love in church and in the secular community, to attend to prayer in public and private, and with the prophets older and newer, to strive for justice for all of creation and humanity within it.

Happy Anniversary, Church of the Advent, and on this the first Sunday of the new church year, to us all, Happy New Year.