

Teaching - Second Week of Advent - December 10, 2017
Written and Presented by Linda Barry

Last week we began to explore our focus for this Advent season: “As it was in the beginning, is now, and will be forever.” So we reflected on Jesus’ birth (as it was in the beginning). Tonight we will focus on “**is now**”. So we will begin to look at how the incarnation of Jesus affects our lives in present time.

Last week our take-home questions led us to think of our past, our childhood, our life long values and the other events which have shaped us. We considered how those things shaped our understanding of who we are and who God is. Throughout history mankind seems to have known there is a God but God was beyond comprehension. Jesus changed all that. Cynthia Bourgeault in her book The Wisdom Jesus says “Jesus became the bridge between God and man.” He turned the world upside down and showed us what it looked like for a man to be in union with God; to be in relationship with God.

At least once a week most of us pray the prayer Jesus taught us to pray, which begins “*Our Father* in heaven”. In this prayer Jesus teaches us that God is not just “*his* Father” but God is “*our* Father”. I have been thinking about those words, and I realize that when I pray this prayer I am actually speaking to “*My* Father”. If God is our father then a little bit of God’s “DNA” is in each of us. Part of God is in our very make up. So God is a part of who I am right now.

When I was a teenager there were people in our church who did not know me, but who knew my mother. From time to time one of these folks would see me with my friends they would say, “You must **belong** to Maurine Hollingsworth.” I would reply that I was her daughter. Then I would ask, “How did you know that I am Maurine’s daughter?” To which they would answer, “I can see her in you.” So how did those people see my mother in me? The DNA we shared made me look a lot like her. And because I lived with my mother and watched the way she did things, I picked up her ways. Certainly both my DNA and my relationship with my mother influenced who I was. If people can see that I belong to my mother because of my DNA and my relationship with her, then can people see that I belong to God as well? Yes, I believe that they can. That part of God that is in each one of us along with our relationship with God influences who we are and how we live our lives.

I recently read a book called Let Your Life Speak by a Quaker named Parker Palmer. One of the things Parker Palmer says is “The life I am living is not the same as the life that wants to live in me.” What he means by that is we need to listen to what our lives are saying to us or we will forget our own truth. He also says that many of us spend much of our lives living as the person we think we ought to be. For me what that means is that I lived my life as the person my parents thought I should be. Later, I lived my life as my friends thought I should live it. I spent many years doing a job that someone expected me to do. And most of my life I thought my job was who I was. Sometimes I would see a friend who seemed to have their life together and I

would think “Wow! That is the life I want to live.” But I was asking to live someone else’s life not my own. “The life I was living was not the same as the life that wanted *to live in me* it was the life that I thought *I ought to live.*”

The life I was living was a “false life” that was created by our culture. It is easy for us to become addicted to a “false-life” and its expectations and demands. We worry about how we are seen and valued by others, and we lose touch with our “true self”, the self which is made in the image of God and finds its deepest fulfillment in living in union with God. Our “true self” is begging to be born in us.

Sister Joan Chitister says, “If you are not dead; you are not done.” I have come to love this quote because I realize that transformation is not a once and done thing. If we allow the Spirit to direct us, we are ever changing, growing, and transforming. Throughout our lives we are called to change and to be transformed into our “true self” (to become something new). And I agree with Parker Palmer when he says, “It takes all our lives to become the person we have always been.”

Guidance to who I am in Christ does not come from a voice "out there" calling me to become something I “ought to be”. It comes from a voice "in here" calling me to be the person I was born to be, to fulfill the original selfhood given me at birth by God. It is a strange gift, this birthright of “true self”. Accepting the life that is our own real life sometimes turns out to be even more demanding than attempting to become someone we think I ought to be. It means letting go of control and being vulnerable. I don’t know about you, but for me letting go of control is scary. So I have sometimes responded to that inner voice by ignoring the call to change, or hiding from it, or running from it. And if the truth be told I suspect that I am not alone in doing this.

Does God want to do something completely new in us? And do we have a vision of what that might be? This Advent I challenge each of us: to be open to becoming the person we were born to be, to listen to that voice inside us, and to be willing to change. Listening and letting go is not easy! We often find ourselves waiting to hear that voice from within and we find ourselves living with many questions and few answers. Waiting and listening for God is hard for most Americans. It is even counter-cultural because we are accustomed to instant answers. Learning to live within God’s time and learning to listen for God’s voice takes practice. And when the answers to our questions come we may have to change.

But we do not have to do this alone. God seeks us out in order to love us, sustain us, help us, encourage us, and yes, challenge us. As the Gospel we just read says, “...the Holy Spirit...will teach you everything and remind you of all that I (Jesus) have said to you.” So Jesus’ life gives us the key to living our true life and the Spirit is gives us wisdom and guides us into living the life for which we were created.

How does Jesus’ life instruct our lives today? Jesus is divine and the gospel of John tells us that he was there in the beginning of creation. But Jesus gave up everything to come live among us. What amazing, crazy love gives up everything and comes to

live among us! When I read stories of people who give up wealth and privilege to live among the poor and marginalized I think they must truly love their neighbors in the deepest way. And that is what Jesus did, but he gave up all the power, all the glory, everything...what he gave is beyond anything we can imagine. He left all that was perfect and was born to this hard and violent world. He was willing to come into our world and experience what we experience and to show us how to live now in this place. Jesus gave us the key to living our lives when he said, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind...and...love your neighbor as yourself."

Earlier I said that, "a little bit of God's "DNA" is in each of us." God's DNA that is within us is LOVE. From time to time Holy Comforter asks us, "Where have you seen God today?" For me the answer is often I have seen God in my friend in the way he or she loves. The epistle that Danny read tonight was 1 Corinthians 13. It is one of the best known passages in the Bible. We have all heard it read in church and at weddings. It has long been etched in my mind. I memorized this passage at age 9. My sorority uses it as part of its ritual. And I have recited it on nights when I was at the end of my rope. There is much here to "inwardly digest". But tonight I call your attention to just three words. "**Love never ends.**" This Advent as we continue our journey to find who we are in Christ and to deepen our relationship with God, and as we await the incarnation, I ask you to remember: That God's DNA which is Love has been with you from the beginning, is with you now, and will be with you always. "Love never ends." Amen.

Meditation question for Second Week of Advent - Evening Prayer:

Where do you see Christ's Love in your life?
How much does God love you?"