

IMMEDIACY AND EXPECTATION: PREACHING THE ADVENT LECTIONS IN YEAR B

A Reflection Day with Titus Presler for Preachers in Region 2, Diocese of New York
Tuesday, 18 November 2008, 12 noon-3 p.m.
Zion Episcopal Church, Dobbs Ferry, N.Y.

Collect for Proper 28

Blessed Lord, who caused all holy Scriptures to be written for our learning: Grant us so to hear them, read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest them, that we may embrace and ever hold fast the blessed hope of everlasting life, which you have given us in our Savior Jesus Christ; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever.
Amen.

Lectionary Choice

- 2006 General Convention made RCL the official lectionary of ECUSA
- OT narratives are a major reason for RCL:
 - BCP track OT complements gospel of the day
 - RCL track highlights semi-continuous narrative:
 - Year A: narratives from Genesis & Exodus
 - Year B: David's story & Wisdom literature
 - Year C: Prophets in chronological order
 - but no second track in Advent! mostly similar to BCP
- Ecumenical community: 15 Protestant churches, ECUSA, RCC
- Reflection day is based on RCL, but with attention to BCP

Environments for Advent Preaching This Year

What can we say about environments we all share?

politically, socially, economically, globally, regionally, statewide

global & US American economic catastrophe underway this fall
parishioners losing jobs or afraid of losing jobs
household budgets constrained
life savings much diminished
parish & diocesan budgets will be hit hard
transition in government
Obama administration replacing Bush administration
many in NY State delighted and eagerly anticipating future
some in NY State disappointed and apprehensive about future
day of particular hope for African Americans and minorities
NY State governorship in transition from Spitzer to David Paterson
maybe a NY State senatorial transition, depending on Hilary's future
global "clash of civilizations," or at least of cultures and religions
Christian-Muslim and Christian-Hindu conflicts continue
wars in Iraq and Afghanistan

some hope that Obama will turn US foreign policy positively
 recent outrage: Somali gang-raped teenage girl stoned to death
 environmental crisis
 global warming
 deforestation
 trash accumulation
 ideological & ethnic clashes in USA
 gay rights limited in several state referendums
 Ecuadoran immigrant beaten and stabbed to death by seven on Long Is.
 experiences of information overload

How do these environments affect our approach to Advent?

Are there local environments to your parishes that you'd like to share?

Advent I: Longing and the End

Isaiah 64.1-9	~	Isaiah 64.1-9a
Psalms 80.1-7, 16-18	~	Psalms 80 or 80.1-7
1 Corinthians 1.3-9	~	1 Corinthians 1.1-9
Mark 13.24-37	~	Mark 13.(24-32) 33-37

Isaiah 64.1-9: longing for God to be revealed

tripartite division of Isaiah:

- 1 Isaiah: chs. 1-39: 8th-c. Judean prophet
- 2 Isaiah: ch. 40-55: Babylonian exile in 6th c., written 545-539
- 3 Isaiah: ch. 56-66: Judah after return from exile in 539 BC
life still harsh: economic oppression, pagan rituals

longing not necessarily for deliverance, but simply for manifestations of presence!

theophany as of old

powerful images: water to the boil, fire kindling brushwood

hiddenness of God: God absent, self-concealed on account of sin

sin eclipses the manifestation of God in our lives

touching acknowledgement of source in God: potter & clay

v. 9b: "Now consider, we are all your people!"

great ending // Ecce homo!

Cloud of Unknowing: God completely unknowable through intellect

but God completely knowable through love

how might this longing be shared by people in our parishes?

global focus: "so that the nations might tremble at your presence"

i.e., implications go beyond the limits of our own hearts and lives

Psalms 80.1-7, 16-18: longing now for deliverance

"Shepherd of Israel, leading Joseph like a flock" – tender image
 restoration and salvation to the fore
 acknowledgement, as in Isa. 64, that sin has intervened
 "one at your right hand" = the king . . . messianic anticipation?
 NRSV does not have "son of man"

1 Corinthians 1.3-9: opening greeting to Corinthians

too bad that salutation not included, as in BCPL: people edified by context
 greeting at Advent I: encouragement, affirmation of community
 "as you wait for the revealing of our LJC" = echo of Isaiah on revealing
Parousia in view, the further or 2nd coming
 Paul probably expecting the *Parousia* within their lifetimes
 note irony, sarcasm, of Paul's mention of "not lacking spiritual gifts"
 much of letter devoted to Corinthians' arrogance about their gifts
 so don't take that commendation simply at face value!

Mark 13.24-37: cosmic signs at day of the Lord, so keep alert!

"in those days after that suffering" – good to note *what* suffering!
 so note texts earlier in ch. 13
 signs, Son of Man, ingathering – all echo OT themes
 2nd part: "keep alert . . . keep awake"
 crucial to be aware of signs and act accordingly
 parable of householder echoes seasonal stewardship themes

*how might parishioners relate to this apocalyptic vision?
 might longing for God's revelation be a uniting theme?*

Advent 2: Comfort & Preparation for End & Coming One

Isaiah 40.1-11	=	Isaiah 40.1-11
Psalms 85.1-2, 8-13	~	Psalms 85 or 85.7-13
2 Peter 3.8-15a	~	2 Peter 3.8-15a, 18
Mark 1.1-8	=	Mark 1.1-8

Isaiah 40.1-11: Comfort, comfort ye my people – Here is your God!

from 2 Isaiah, Babylonian captivity, in fact, the clarion opening to chs. 40-55
 revelation sought in Isaiah 64 is now promised
 "glory of the Lord shall be revealed: Here is your God!"
 remarkable assertion and a good preaching start
 will feed his flock like a shepherd // Advent I's Ps. 80
 preparatory voice in the wilderness: "What shall I cry?"
 transitory frailty of human beings
 get up to high mountain with good news = evangelism!
 = *preacher's task!*
we can hear this passage directed to us as preachers

*how might parishioners receive this lesson?
how do you as the preacher feel with this proclamation task?*

Psalm 85.1-2, 8-13: "mercy & truth have met together"

celebration of fulfillment of God's promises:

God gracious after people's sin
God speaking peace to God's faithful people
mercy and truth have met together: *worth a sermon in itself!*
Lord will indeed grant prosperity:
*quite a promise in biggest recession since Depression!
how is this different from health-and-wealth gospel?!
this might a good time to tackle that question*

2 Peter 3.8-15a: how should we live while waiting for day of the Lord?

cosmic Technicolor of end of the world: heaven and earth "dissolve"

with more after Advent I, good time to think eschatologically

promise of a new heaven & a new earth

// Revelation, though primarily as place of righteousness

God is patient: time for God is on a different scale

our 1,000 years are like one day for God

Advent is about time: good time to reflect on time

time between the times of first and further comings

time is the dimension most difficult to transcend

just traveling over time zones gets us confused

likewise switch between ST & DT confuses people

we're transitory // Isaiah 40: all people are grass

lifestyle meanwhile: waiting patiently

mostly living at peace, without spot or blemish

we live in time between the times:

we celebrate First Coming best by preparing for Second

RCL lection misses v18's wonderful blessing & doxology:

"But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To him be the glory both now and to the day of eternity. Amen."

Mark 1.1-11: proclamation of John the Baptizer

echo of OT prophecy of today!

messianic expectation in the air

baptism of repentance for forgiveness of sins

*as we see how John prepared people for Jesus, we so prepare
as we look back to that time, we look forward to consummation
real hinge of today's readings is 2 Peter's Parousia expectation*

so how do you feel inclined to preach in your parish?!

Advent 3: Prepare through Jubilee

Isaiah 61.1-4, 8-11	≠	Isaiah 65.17-25
Psalm 126 or Cant. 3 or 15	=	Psalm 126 or Canticle 3 or 15
1 Thessalonians 5.16-24	~	1 Thess. 5.(12-15) 16-28
John 1.6-8, 19-28	~	John 1.6-8, 19-28 /John 3.23-30

RCL: Isaiah 61.1-4, 8-11: Jubilee proclamation

passage read by Jesus in Nazareth synagogue: Luke 4.16ff.

anointing by Spirit

Jubilee proclamation to oppressed

year of the Lord's favor = 50th Jubilee year

Coming One offers not only spiritual blessing

there are real socio-eco-political effects: reordering of society

opportunity to preach social justice message:

oppression within US American society

Millennium Development Goals globally

BCPL: Isaiah 65.17-25: consummation of all things in Jubilee

truly one of the most beautiful passages in all of scripture

new heaven and new earth

real tests are measures we still use in MDGs and marks of societal vitality:

infant mortality, life expectancy

home ownership, small business entrepreneurship

life savings rate

"before they call I will answer" – God's proximity, responsiveness

Peaceable Kingdom of lion and lamb

Psalm 126: "when the Lord restored the fortunes of Zion"

if past, may look to return of exiles from captivity to Jerusalem

evocation of tender joy and relief in that restoration

witness to nations noted: not only for us but for the world

community in distress again, so plea for further restoration

does this not speak to the grief and longing of any community?

how might it speak to memories, fears, longings of your community?

Magnificat: Jubilee celebration – but maybe better in Advent IV?

Jubilee would be good reason to use it this Sunday

mercy and vanquishing of oppression // Isa. 61

John 1.6-8, 19-28: John Baptizer points not to himself but to Messiah

lesson that seeks to differentiate John from Jesus

so that John himself, not Jesus movement, issues disclaimer

argumentative environment not so congenial for preaching
 much of this story is repetitive with Mark's last week

so you may wish to choose which week to focus on John the Baptizer

or BCPL alternative: John 3.23-30: John and disciples about baptism and Jesus

v22 missing: Jesus also was baptizing!

testimony here, v26 and 4.1 are the only bits that allude to Jesus baptizing
 more testimony to John's testimony to Jesus!

famous: "He must increase, but I must decrease."

Advent 4: Annunciation

2 Samuel 7.1-11, 16

~ 2 Samuel 7.4, 8-16

Psalms 89.1-4, 19-26

≠ Psalms 132 or 132.8-15

or Canticle 3 or 15

Romans 16.25-27

= Romans 16.25-27

Luke 1.26-38

= Luke 1.26-38

2 Samuel 7.1-11, 16: David, Nathan & God on houses of God & David

any churches here named after David of Wales?

what has that meant to your congregation?

any connection with David the king in your reflections?

text chosen because of connection with Annunciation:

but there could have been others, e.g., Hannah, biblical visions, etc.

context: Jerusalem becomes David's capital, ch. 5

David defeats the Philistines, ch. 5

David brings the ark to Jerusalem, ch. 6

settledness of new dispensation: house for David

hence need for house for God

particularity: "I will appoint a place for my people Israel" v10

// Incarnation in one person at one place in one time

purpose of inclusion: Lucan Gabriel on "throne of his ancestor David"

BCPL: context is deleted

also Solomon's role in building house for God is included

Psalm 89.1-4, 19-26: David's line to be established forever

celebration of God's faithfulness in David's line

eternity and extent of David's rule

this is a type of scripture that often just goes right by us:

we're not Israel, so David's line does not affect us directly

we're not hierarchical, we think, so throne talk does not grab us

focus, however, is on fact that God works in history:

incarnation is not just about me and Jesus

it's about God working in the historical process

or Magnificat: Jubilee celebration – *maybe best used in Advent IV*

proximity to story of Annunciation
 mercy + vanquishing of oppression // Isa. 61
 cf. Song of Hannah, 1 Sam. 2.1-10

or BCPL: Psalm 132 or 132:8-15:

Harper Study Bible: A royal psalm celebrating God's election of Zion and the sanctuary there as the divine abode on earth and the election of David and the Davidic line as God's ruling representatives.

A Song of Ascents: Superscription to all Pss. 120-134. Reference to ascent of pilgrims on their way to Jerusalem and/or to the sanctuary there. Such psalms may have been sung on such pilgrimages.

1st part of psalm actually refers to OT's Davidic desire for temple
 reference moving of ark to temple in Jerusalem
 Solomon's role in actually building a temple included, as in BCPL OT

Romans 16.25-27: Doxology and Implicit Benediction

textual issues: Pauline? originally part of letter?
 v24 included as ending by some mss after v23, etc.
 initially seems like there is a benediction, but no, only doxology!
 "my gospel" – Paul's particular articulation of the gospel
 main burden is mission to Gentiles, as in 1.27
 revelation of mystery, as in Ephesians

Luke 1.26-38: Annunciation

any churches here named after Annunciation?
what has it meant to your congregation?

receptivity to visions important:

John Koenig: ½ applicants in 30 yrs have visual or auditory visions
 = probably some in this room have! I have!
 so Mary's vision is *not* off the screen or the beaten track
 so important not to take tack of, "visions not necessary" etc.
 rather cultivate receptivity to visions

"The Lord is with you" = answer to longing from Advent I!

// "You shall call him Emmanuel, God with us" in Matthew

Davidic line stressed = God's engagement with historical process

Virgin Birth: this is *locus classicus*!

Catechism:

Q: What do we mean when we say that Jesus was conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit and became incarnate from the Virgin Mary?

A: We mean that by Gods own act, his divine Son received our human nature from the Virgin Mary, his mother.
worth engaging theologically!

Son of God: no definite article in Greek, hence none in NRSV

Mary's acquiescence, then collaboration with God

Mary as co-creator

Karl Rahner: Mary as co-redeemer

*option: guided meditation on Annunciation rather than sermon
 see accompanying outline for guided meditation*

Christmas Eve

Nativity I	Isaiah 9.2-7	~	Isaiah 9.2-4, 6-7
	Psalms 96	~	Psalms 96 or 96.1-4, 11-12
	Titus 2.11-14	=	Titus 2.11-14
	Luke 2.1-14 (15-20)	=	Luke 2.1-14 (15-20)

Isaiah 9.2-7: "People who walked in darkness" plus Names catalogue

oracle for coronation of Judean king, probably Hezekiah

areas in v1 turned into three Assyrian provinces by Tiglath-pileser III

733-32 BC

read aloud v1 as important context

names are coronation names // those given Egyptian kings on accession

Titus 2.11-14: Grace of God has appeared!

"our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ" may also be:

"the great God and our Savior Jesus Christ"

Parousia in view

set amid household codes that may or may not appeal to contemporary readers

Nativity in Luke 2:

vindication of the humble and poor fulfills Isaiah 61, 65 and Magnificat

appearance of glory

adoration at the heart of our relationship with incarnate God

