

Stand Up

November 29, 2009

(Advent 1 – Year C)

Luke 21: 25-36

St. Alban's Episcopal Church, Waco, Texas

Advent is now here.

Advent is the season of the church year that is right before Christmas.

And in Advent, the color on the altar and of my vestments is now blue, signifying hope and expectation.

The Advent wreath is now displayed – with one blue candle lit.

We will light an additional blue candle, each Sunday, until all 4 candles are lit and the white Christ candle will be lit on Christmas Eve.

Flowers on the altar have been replaced by simple greenery.

Advent brings many changes and a new hope.

However, the First Sunday of Advent this year also happens to fall on the weekend when we celebrate the American observance of Thanksgiving.

And I must tell you that, in my heart, I feel closer to pumpkin pie this morning than I do to candy canes.

In my heart, I have not stopped thinking about Thanksgiving.

I have not stopped thinking about all the things and people that I am thankful for.

I have not stopped thinking about all the things that give me hope.

Over this past Thanksgiving weekend, we had the joy of having our two nieces stay with us in our house.

Elizabeth, our oldest niece, is now 7 years old.

And Vivian, who was baptized here last February, is now 13 months old.

It has been a long time since we have had a baby in our house.

And it was fun to watch Vivian do all those silly little baby tricks and games, games such as peek-a-boo.

During the high scoring Texas vs. Texas A&M football game, we even taught Vivian a new trick.

We would throw our arms up in the air and exclaim: “Touchdown.”

And, after a while, Vivian would respond to every touchdown by throwing her arms up into the air, as well.

Yet what I enjoyed watching the most - was Vivian's efforts at standing up on her own.

If we tried to get her to stand up on her own, she would teeter for a few minutes, then collapse into little heap on the floor.

However, if she spied something that she wanted, such as the TV remote control on the coffee table,

Then Vivian would work with determination to reach her little hands up to the edge of the coffee table.

Then she would slowly pull herself up and raise her head, always clearly focused on the prize.

Finally, once she was poised at the edge of the coffee table, she would toddle over to whatever she was wanting.

And before we knew it, she was standing completely upright on her own, without holding on to anything.

Vivian was able to stand completely on her own, only when she was totally focused on the hope and the expectation of what she wanted.

Jesus says:

“Stand up and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near.”

Jesus also says, in the Gospel of Luke, all kinds of scary things about the end of time.

Sometimes I think, as Christians, we mistakenly put our focus on the awful roaring of the sea and the scary signs in the sun and moon and stars.

Yet instead, we are to stand up and raise our heads.

We are to stay clearly focused on Jesus and his words – words that will never pass away.

In life, we tend to focus on the bad stuff.

Yet we should focus on all the things and people that we are thankful for.

We should focus on all the things that give us hope.

Like my little niece, we are able to stand completely on our own, only when we are focused on hope and expectation.

And our hope comes from Jesus who says:

“Stand up and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near.”

I have a second cousin who had a baby last spring.

Her baby, Natalie, was born prematurely, with heart defects and a whole list of health problems.

Already, in the first few months of her life, little Natalie has practically lived at the hospital and has endured several different surgeries.

My cousin, this baby's mother, sends out regular email updates to the family regarding Natalie's health.

These emails are filled with sobering news of intravenous tubes and heart monitors and around the clock hospital care.

However these emails are also filled with thankfulness and with faith.

These emails are filled with the good news of hope and expectation that Natalie will survive the next surgery and that the next treatment will bring her to fullness of health and wholeness.

I do not know whether baby Natalie will make it through all the health hurdles ahead of her.

But I know that her mother has found redemption, she has found wholeness, because she has chosen to stand up, rather than to crumple into a heap on the ground.

She has chosen to raise her head up in thankfulness and look to Jesus, the same Jesus who says:

“Stand up and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near.”

The posture that we use in this life is important.

For in the midst of roaring seas, Jesus asks us to stand up and to raise our heads.

This is one of the reasons why, when we say the Eucharistic Prayer, the prayer of blessing over the bread and wine, we are given the option to kneel or to stand.

This is one of the reasons why, in the Eucharistic Prayer, we say these words:

“[God] has delivered us from evil, and made us worthy to stand before you.”

Therefore, in our Eucharistic Prayer, we are given the option to stand up and raise our heads.

Because when we stand up and raise our heads, then our liberation, our healing, is so close to us that we can almost feel it.

When we stand up and raise your heads, our redemption is drawing near.

In the midst of the roaring seas of life,
Keep your eyes focused on Jesus and on his hope, hope for the future.
Raise your head in thanksgiving for all the good things in your life.
Pull yourself up by the edge of the coffee table - and stand up.

AMEN.

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