

## **Sermon: 1<sup>st</sup> in Advent, November 28, 2010**

### **Scripture: Matthew 24: 36-44**

Today we begin again – a new cycle in the Christian year. Today is the first in Advent. This next four weeks we will prepare ourselves for the birth of the Christ child. We will retell our Christian story up to the birth of Jesus Christ on Christmas Eve.

We follow a series of scripture readings called the lectionary, that ensures that over a three year period we re-visit our Christian heritage, in the order that it unfolded, so that we might be transformed anew by the hearing of it.

Advent means “coming”. God is coming to dwell among us. Jesus is coming to re-connect us to the Holy – to that which is sacred in life.

It is our job to wait – in quiet anticipation, to prepare our hearts to receive the gift, to make ready the dwelling place of the Lord.

In our reading from the Gospel of Matthew this morning, we hear Jesus talking about the return of the Son of Man, as he calls himself, and the need for all of us to be ready for his coming.

We are challenged to enlarge our vision of Advent. He is coming – a second time as he proclaims in this gospel. We

might also remember that he appeared after his death on the cross to Mary, and then to the disciples on several occasions. He has promised to be with us to the end of the age. What might that mean in terms of his coming? What about all the saints and mystics through the years who have had encounters with the risen Christ? There are people in this room who have a personal and very real relationship with Jesus Christ. There are probably people in this room who know him as the Holy, the sacred places and times in their lives when they feel or have felt that presence.

Last Sunday Clarence and I were not here with you. We were in Vancouver for the birthday of our granddaughter Caitlin. To celebrate, we took the whole family to the Vancouver Aquarium – a place I love, but which I haven't visited since my own sons were children.

It was one of those very special days in Vancouver – a day so crisp and cold that the air seemed to sparkle. The sun was shining in Stanley Park and the mountains seemed so close you could almost count the snow-dusted trees.

We arrived to find the place so busy we had difficulty finding a parking place! Somehow, in my own mind, I thought I was the only grand-parent who thought a visit to the Aquarium this Sunday was a good idea. How wrong I was! The place was jammed with grandparents and their children and

grandchildren of every conceivable nationality and colour. It was humbling to recognize that I am not special on this day. I am part of a movement of God's people much larger than myself. All of us white-haired elders who so want to pass on to the new generations a love and an appreciation for the beauty of God's world.

I do not like zoos. I hate to see animals in cages. But even more, I hate to see the overwhelming plastic and electronic world that seems to be the new reality for our grandchildren. The "best" presents are electronic toys I can't even remember the names of, and plastic toys that entertain for a few minutes, and are quickly forgotten and discarded to end up as landfill.

So we entered the flow of this very multi-generational, multi-ethnic crowd and watched as the children darted excitedly from one exhibit to another. It was gratifying to watch my son, their father, transformed now into a gentle giant watching over us all with quiet care to keep us all together.

It was fun to watch six year old Ethan, who can't sit still for two minutes, as he listened enthralled by some story only he and his grandpa were sharing.

My heart was very full that afternoon. In one large tank there were manta rays – huge ones. I watched for a moment as they swam so gracefully around the tank, their large fins furling and unfurling like angel wings, and I thought to myself how

beautiful they are, and how wrong it is for them to be in captivity. And then I realized that if they were not in captivity, my grandchildren and all these other grandchildren would not see them and grow to appreciate their beauty.

My heart filled with gratitude in that moment of realization – that the sacrifice of all these living things was to the enrichment of the experience of the sacred for all these children.

As I stood there, right next to the tank, my eyes brimming with tears of understanding, a huge manta ray swam right over to me and stopped there. For just a moment, a still long moment, his eyes met mine. Have you ever looked into the eyes of a manta ray? Old eyes. Eyes that seemed to know my thoughts. Eyes that seemed to thank me for my understanding. A sacred moment in the midst of the busyness of life.

All in all, it was a blessed weekend. We were not touched by the storms. We arrived in places right after the snow plows had been through. We got home to Texada on Monday night to find the roads well plowed and sanded. No problems.

We will probably not see this family now for several months. Christ will come, and we will be here, and they will celebrate in Vancouver – likely a very materialistic Christmas – but we have had this jewel of a weekend with them. We have planted seeds that will grow in time. We have seen the awe

and wonder in the eyes of the children as they watched the dolphins leap high in the air and speed across the pool at amazing speed. We watched quietly as they discovered sea horses and watched the sharks feed, and enjoyed with them the antics of sea otters as they groomed and played within a few feet of us.

We can relax now in the certainty that they will not forget – that God’s transforming presence has been reinforced in their lives.

Yes, in this Advent season we wait for the coming of the Christ child. But let us heed the warnings of Jesus and of Paul. People be ready! For you do not know the hour or the day of his coming. Like Mary and Elizabeth in our opening prayer, may we, pregnant with your Spirit, affirm one another in hope for the world.