

SUNDAY NEXT BEFORE ADVENT – 2009
SERMON - CHRIST CHURCH PARISH
FATHER JOHN ALTBERG
THE COLLECT, JEREMIAH XXIII, JOHN VI



STIR UP, WE ASK YOU, GOD, YOUR PEOPLE TO DO THE RIGHT THINGS...FOR WHICH THEY WILL BE GREATLY REWARDED.

If this week, the final week of the Church Year, catches you by surprise, we are in the same club! The BCP identifies today in precise terms as *THE SUNDAY NEXT BEFORE ADVENT*, which indeed it is...more popularly, taking its identity from the opening words of the Collect, it is known as *STIR UP SUNDAY*...

In preparation for Advent we are called to stay focused on the RIGHT THINGS...simple order...often difficult to sort out in what seems an increasingly complex series of options. It is easily possible to STIR in the opposite direction from which we should!

We easily find ourselves rationalizing...How important is all this stuff anyway? Perhaps I'll just wait and see what develops...I have a lot on my plate to be ready for Christmas! The Church corrects such faulty logic by STIRRING us to concentrate on that which we are called to do...through which we receive the reward of a more ordered life...to our own benefit and all around us. Put another way...we create the life in which we invest...life is better when we make sound investments!

Today's Epistle, taken from the Prophecy of Jeremiah speaks with clarity to impending Advent...getting ready for the arrival of a King...one from the lineage of David. In a more obscure yet poignant way it speaks to God's having acted in history to set things straight.

Jeremiah relates the story of Zedekiah, the puppet King of Judah, installed and propped up by the Babylonian King and political despot of the time, Nebuchadnezzar. Zedekiah and his band were thrown out of Judah after upheaval and strife about 600 years before the birth of Jesus. Jeremiah relates that Zedekiah sometimes consulted with him about the messy state of the nation. Jeremiah wrote...This is what the Lord God of Israel said about the rulers who were supposed to take care of his people. You have not taken care of my people; you have scattered and driven them away.

[Now you are going to pay for what you have done.] I will gather the rest of my people from the countries where scattered them and bring them back to their homeland. I will appoint rulers to take care of them. My people will no longer be afraid or terrified. The time is coming when I will choose as king, a righteous descendant of David. That, as Jeremiah predicted, is exactly what God did about 600 years later...and that is exactly the point. The Collect asks God to help us put an end to accumulated lethargy...get STIRRED UP again that we might benefit from what he has done for us.

Getting stirred up about these matters is not a call to arms or political activism but rather a call to "RIGHT THINGS"...right thoughts, attitudes, behaviors, works, etc.

Like prayer, on which we focused last Sunday, we can find a plethora of excuses for not involving ourselves right now...most commonly heard...*just don't have the time right now...yes, it's important, I'll get around to it later...*

But the reality is, God calls us to get stirred up NOW...no 'wait and see'...not LATER...

Consider today's Gospel...John's version of the miracle of the feeding of five thousand people without the benefit of a catering firm! What has it to do with getting ready for Advent and the coming of God into our lives?

Back to Jeremiah...consider those words immediately preceding the part chosen for today's Epistle... I will gather the rest of my people from the countries where they are scattered and bring them back. Jesus says the same thing in at the end of the meal...*GATHER THE FRAGMENTS THAT REMAIN, THAT NOTHING BE LOST*. The disciples did so...they filled twelve baskets... symbolically one for each of the twelve tribes of Israel.

In the same way, we are called NOW to gather the fragments, in whatever form they exist in our individual or collective lives, and bring them together so we lose nothing and in so doing are STIRRED TO RIGHT THINGS...TO GREAT BENEFIT...TO OURSELVES.

