

Sermon for November 29, 2009
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You probably already know that the word "apocalyptic" means revelation, as in seeing something for the first time that you have looked at a hundred times before. Revelation is the moment when you see through or into or beyond. Revelation is like those magic eye drawings. Many times, though I try all the prescribed tricks: squinting, following the tip of my thumb and so forth, and I still can't see the picture inside. I am probably just a bit dense. But, I had a revelation of sorts this past week. As you may have heard I was in Texas last week where I attended the Cowboys-Redskins game, and then traveled on to San Antonio for a few days of fun on the Riverwalk. We had dinner with Roger and Liz Hungerford on Tuesday and then returned home on Thursday afternoon. They are well and asked us to tell you hello, thanks for your support, and they miss you. Now, on to the revelation (which is the part I am sure you are most interested in anyway. So I am at the new stadium. We were in the parking lot perusing some of the 1200 tailgate parties. Did you know that people pay \$1500 to buy a parking space for these parties? Then, they buy gas powered generators so they can set up their satellite dishes and their wide screen TV on the tailgate next to the four foot long cooler of ice (to keep the brew ice cold, and the steaks pink). Then they set up the party tent, and the lounge chairs (which they haul in a 6x4 trailer behind the Ford F-350, light the charcoal and spend the day in the parking lot fighting for a spot in line at the porta-potties. While we were out party cruisin' I overheard a radio DJ discussing the rivalry between the Cowboys and the Redskins. The discussion went sort of like this "so, Dick this is one of the oldest rivalries in pro ball. How did that rivalry come about do you think?" "I don't know Jay, but it's been around a long time. I remember as a kid here in Texas, we used to play Cowboys and Indians all the time. But on the day Dallas played Washington, we stayed in the house and got ready for the game". "Well, Jay I am not sure how it got started either, them being on the East Coast and all. St. Louis or New Orleans would make more sense to me but it sure is a lot of fun"! I wonder how many others can't see the source of that rivalry that has been right in front of them all these years?

So we headed into the stadium and as the seats begin to fill, a digital display flashes now and then telling how many people have entered. About 5 minutes into the game I realized I was one of 82,000 people who flew, drove, walked or crawled to see this most famous of rivalries. There was a lot of good natured razzing and trash-talkin' going on before the game. I was one of about 6 Skins fans in our seating area so we had to ask the "the Boys boys" not to block our view of the butt whuppin' party about to take place on the field, and they felt the need to remark on how nice it was of them to allow us to sit in their new stadium. We won. At least until they scored a touchdown and field goal in the last 2 minutes of the game. We let em have it cause it would have been rude to beat them in their new stadium while they're getting used to the new turf and all. Sometime during the game, my deacon brain checked in. I realized that everyone of those 82,000 people had paid at least \$150 to sit down for the game, 1200 people had paid \$1500 for a parking space for 10 home games, hundreds of people paid \$50-\$75 to stand up outside the seating areas and watch for those three hours. In addition, each of those tailgate parties probably cost in the neighborhood of \$4-\$500, and folks in the stadium were paying \$8 a beer, \$6 a coke, \$6 hotdogs, \$12 for a hand sized Pizza, \$8 for nachos or ice cream. Least expensive? \$4 for a 12oz bottle of water. So as I sat there, I also realized that this is the case at every major football stadium in the country on any given Sunday. So then my brain really kicked into overdrive (I am sure the folks seated around me could smell the smoke as I tried to do the math in my head) and I finally arrived at my revelation! Remember those MDG's? Those Millenium Development Goals? The one where we say we want to cut poverty and hunger in half by 2015? I bet that in the US alone, we could cut it nearly in half by donating all the money we spend in one day at one professional football game. If every professional franchise from football, to baseball to NASCAR donated 1 % of its yearly PROFIT we could end hunger in the US and pay for healthcare for every child and person over 65 in the US. Does that surprise you at all? It did me. Right there in front of me all alongI just never paid attention I guess.

Our expectations can sometimes blind us as well. We expect to see something a certain way. When it doesn't look the way we thought it would, we don't see it. I worry that when Jesus does return we won't recognize him because he might not look like the picture of Jesus in the Hallmark card we got at our baptism or confirmation. Of course he should have long brown hair, olive skin, almond shaped eyes and have copious amounts of facial hair. But what if he is driving an old broken down Cadillac, wearing cowboy boots and has a wad of dip in his cheek? Or what if he is ³ smelly, has dreads tied up with a shoe string and asks you for 82 cents to make bus fare? Weirder things are possible I suppose. "Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary?" The things right in front of us have

always been the hardest things to see.

Today we conclude the long season of Pentecost and prepare our heart anew for the coming of Jesus. Today we begin Advent by hearing from Jesus and from the prophet Jeremiah. They describe what it means to have God draw near. The pictures they paint are at once dark and foreboding and spectacularly brilliant.

In the past 10-15 years we have experienced several wonders and signs in heaven and on earth that seem to signal the coming of the end of the world as we know it. The world watched in horror as the bodies of the Heaven's Gate members were discovered, we couldn't help but wonder what the world was coming to. The cult members had seen the Hale Bopp comet as a sign of the end times and they happily were looking forward to a better world. In ancient times comets were thought to be warnings of horrible destruction or signs of new things to come. But when we see the grim reality of people who leapt too soon at the idea of a new world, we are reminded of the deep sadness in the pit of our stomachs when the pained faces of their loved ones flashed before us. How senseless it all seemed when the event came and went and nothing happened.

The paper and magazines were flooded with articles and television and radio was full of programs that warned of the imminent destruction of vast computer systems when the year 2000 came. Because no one had the foresight to program a prefix for year-numbers, all the world's computers might have failed at once. The press and the scientific community as well as the federal government were frantically searching for a solution. Since the early 1970's much of business, science, medicine and libraries (just to mention a few) have become computerized. We need computers to shop, to pay the bills, to talk on the phone. Computers are now involved in all aspects of our lives. If no solution had been found, life as we know it would have come to a grinding halt. And then words of Jesus come to mind, "people will faint from fear and foreboding." And ... nothing happened.

9/11 scared the poop out of all of us because we realized that we are vulnerable, we have become complacent in thinking that we (the United States) are all that and a bag of chips, and we realized that there are people out there who hate us with an irrational kind of loathing and are willing to die to drive that point home for us. Now we have the war in Iraq and Afghanistan, nuclear fears from Iran and North Korea, environmental degradation and destruction, out of control healthcare costs and poor healthcare, the gap between those who have and those who have nothing continues to grow wider and wider, our economy while showing some signs of perking up is still sluggish and unpredictable (maybe we should let the Dallas Cowboys franchise run the country for awhile), our prisons are full, our education system is broken.

If I were truthful for a moment with you, I would confess how often I find myself overwhelmed by worry. I suspect you may feel this too. Our children worry us, our health worries us, all the risk factors around us worry us. The state of the economy and the moral decline of local and national government worries us. Drugs and violence worry and scare us. Human beings as a whole are creatures with a great deal of anxiety in our hearts. Maybe that is why we continue to see these things as signs of the end being near? Is there any good news?

The good news in our Gospel today is that, despite the fact that we live in anxious times, in spite of the fact that some of the signs point to the end of the world, Jesus tells us that we can stand and lift our heads high for our redemption is near. When things look most frightening, says Our Lord, is when our lives are closest to God, and God is doing a new thing in our lives.

The Gospel challenges us, during this Advent season, to live as people who expect God to be near, and that God is doing something new in our lives. In this Advent season of preparation, the time of Christ's coming into the world, we are to live as if we expect just that. Christ's coming. What does that mean to our daily lives? That means we are to see the worries in our lives as possibilities. We are to look anew on the people and situations that trouble us as signs of God's near and living presence. That we can look at the dark skies and the dark places as moments of waiting and anticipating God's nearness. This means that we don't have to be bound by our fear, but that we can look through our fear

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and see God. It means that the painful relationships can be made whole, not by our will or power, but by God's. Because it is God who chooses, through Christ, to draw near to us .

This means that you and I can look anew at the painful situations and offer them to God.

As we prepare our hearts and minds for the coming of Christ Jesus in a new way this Advent, let us also receive those around us in a new way. Let us see and know that God wants to transform and make new even the most impossible situations in our lives. Let us look and see Jesus in those around us who have caused us heartache and pain. As God draws near we are given the strength to see others in a new way. And truly then, the world as we now it will pass away, and all things will be made new. Amen.