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Redwoods Presbyterian Church
Larkspur, California
December 2, 2012
First Sunday of Advent
Homily

My Advent message today is a short sermon, in other words, a homily.

As most of us know, the word "Advent" is an English version of the Latin word *adventus*, which means "coming." Latin *adventus* is the translation of the Greek word *Parousia*, which refers to the Second Coming of Christ.

The season of Advent anticipates the coming of Christ from two perspectives. The season offers the opportunity to share in the ancient longing for the coming of the Messiah and to be alert for his Second Coming. The New Testament attests and Christians believe that the Messiah came in Jesus and the Second Coming comes in the lives of disciples as they/we long for, look to and work for Christ's peaceable realm.

This double perspective of Messiah and Second Coming is difficult to understand in our modern world. Some Christian scholars ignore it altogether, or they affirm that Jesus was the Messiah and they see the Second Coming as mere apocalyptic symbolism. Some feel that Advent can only be explained in poetic language. One of the better descriptions of Advent I've read lately is the following:

"Advent is a twofold time of waiting. We all wait, obviously, for the joyful birth of the Christ child, the Prince of Peace come at last. Though it doesn't permeate our popular culture the way the 'Christmas Spirit' does, Advent also points us to endings. The lectionary texts of Advent point to the closing of an age. They speak to some of the troubled conditions of our world. However, it is precisely the challenge and struggles of the present day that make the birth of hope into our world not just a memory of the past, but a promise for the future." (From a recent correspondence with a pastor - RC)

In Advent we long for war to end and peace to come; for oppression to end and freedom to come; for inequality to end and justice to come; for estrangement to end and reconciliation to come; for poverty, hunger, and sickness to end and health to come; for hatred to end and love to come; for death to end and life to come. It is difficult to believe that all these will ever come and yet they do and will, we believe, through Jesus in the lives and actions of faithful disciples.

German theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer spent the winter of 1943 in prison for his resistance to Nazism. On the first morning of Advent, following a frightening night of bombing he arose, prayed and hung a wreath on his prison wall. No matter how bleak his life he remembered how God was revealed in Jesus. Advent commemorated the coming of Jesus into the world and into his life. Although he would be hanged by the Gestapo the next year Bonhoeffer knew and expected that in the end Jesus' world of peace and justice would prevail. He rested in that fact.

No doubt, he knew the words of Charles Wesley's famous Advent song:

Come thou long-expected Jesus,
Born to set Thy people free;
From our fears and sins release us,
Let us find our rest in Thee.

Israel's strength and consolation,
Hope of all the earth Thou art;
Dear Desire of every nation,
Joy of every longing heart.

In Advent we take courage that God has come in Jesus and comes daily and will come to set humanity and the world free. In this coming we find rest, strength, consolation, hope and joy.
Amen.