

**December 7, 2008**

**Advent II**

**“The Cross and the Cradle”**

Isaiah 40:1-11 “Comfort, Comfort, my people.”

Mark 14:22-25 Lord’s Supper

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At the store a busy mother finds a large box of Christmas cards at a greatly reduced price and stuffs it in her shopping cart. Later at home she hastily scribbles the family name inside and sends them out to all on their Christmas list. One more job blessedly checked off.

Along about New Year’s some of her friends wear a puzzled look. “Did we miss something?” they ask. She goes home, finds an unused card at the bottom of the box, and finally reads the printed message inside:

This jolly card is sent to say  
A Christmas gift is on its way.

Here we are smack in the middle of the Christmas rush, when such mistakes can so easily be made.

But on this second Sunday of Advent, having lit the candles of hope and peace, may we slow down and experience the true gifts of the season.

Many of us are giving blood today in the Fellowship Hall to help provide what Tom Moore will need in the weeks ahead. Church people from San Dimas and Claremont and many from the colleges are contributing. It is truly a labor of love, a literal outpouring of care for a beloved church member, colleague and friend.

On this special Sunday here in the sanctuary we prepare to share these symbols of Christ’s body broken and Christ’s blood poured out for us. The synchronicity of Fellowship Hall and Sanctuary this morning, is not lost upon us. In 12 Step programs a favorite saying goes, “With God there are no mere coincidences.”

On this Second Sunday in Advent we heard Topher Elderkin sing of Christ’s earthly beginnings and endings in this simple song:

I wonder as I wander out under the sky  
How Jesus our savior did come for to die.

The cross and the cradle, parts of the whole.

A wise English Christian, Bishop Walpole has said, “If you are uncertain of which two paths to take, choose the one on which the shadow of the cross falls.” That is the way of the Christ child.

The cross is never far from us. We know diminishment and disappointment. Our pastor’s husband and others in the congregation, as Rusty shared this morning, experience life-threatening illness.

And in this time of financial uncertainty, we inhabit a culture of getting more, which seems to leave us with less.

Our own Hunger Kitchen is in great need just now--without our help many will be turned away. Let those Mission Angels fly!

And daily we experience the worldly powers working through violence and fear. This week among so many other places, they broke out in India., and now in Greece.

But a child is born in a cave where animals are kept. For want of a proper cradle, he is laid to sleep in the feeding trough. Perhaps the animals nudge closer to smell the baby, pushing their soft noses into the manger before the mother can shoo them away.

And the shadow of the cross looms over the stable.

The local king gets wind of something abroad in the land and sends out his militia to stamp out the threat--whatever challenges his primacy.

The world's age old deadly powers are on the move.

And as the child grows in wisdom and stature and favor with God and humanity, he senses the divine call upon him and within him. He resists the temptation to use his dawning gifts to impress, to gain power and influence.

The boy child grown to manhood gathers about himself women and men into a new community, welcoming and inclusive. He says to them, "The kingdom of God is among you" Or as Liz Moore speaks so tellingly, "The kin-dom of God is among you." For even with our great differences we are indeed God's kin--part of the beloved family.

Jesus heals the sick and tells them their sins are forgiven. Such things were supposed to be handled in the temple by the religious authorities! He sits at supper with his new faith family, and embodies the love of God. Again and again along the road toward Calvary, they share the bread of life, and the cup of blessing.

And on that final night in the upper chamber of a borrowed home, under the shadow of the cross he offers them himself--his simple Way, his Spirit; the wine his lifeblood soon to be poured out for them; and his body so soon to be broken like the loaf they pass around that sacred table.

In later years there would be much deliberation as to whether in the Lord's Supper, the Holy Communion, the bread and wine actually become the Lord's physical body and blood. Wars would be fought over whether Jesus was God appearing in human form, or fully human but filled with the presence of the divine--or somehow both.

But for me, I simply trust that when people were in the presence of Jesus they just found themselves saying 'God! God!'

And sometimes when we experience the risen Christ in our community and in our own deep hearts and discover his presence out in the rough scrabble world we too find ourselves saying "God! God!"

For the one who was born in a manger and died on a cross is with us at the hospital bed, the job interview, the work place, the hunger kitchen, the blood bank, the church school session that didn't go quite as we'd planned it (do they ever?).

Christ is present in the yearning of family for renewal and reconciliation, and in our lonely midnight, and the calm of a winter morning.

And in this simple meal Christ is known to us in the breaking of the bread and the sharing of the cup--for our forgiveness, our reconciliation, our healing, our hope, our peace. And then Christ sends us out --virtually kicks us out till next Sunday anyway--to be his disciples, his friends caring for a needy world.

So come. Come to the table.

Come--receive the gifts of God for the people of God. All are invited--all are welcome.

Take and eat. Receive and drink. Then depart refreshed and renewed to walk this cradled and cross-laden journey.

So as we sing together, let the servers come forward on the final verse:

"Be Known to Us in Breaking Bread."