

Last week saw the American Festival of Thanksgiving, a time at which the American people remember the very early days of the settlers from Britain, the difficulties they had in establishing their communities, a sense of thanks giving when with the gathering of their first harvest. It is a celebration in which Americans make the story of their founding fathers their story.

Today, the First Sunday in Advent, is another special day in the life of the Church. Those of you who were here last Sunday will notice a difference as you came in; gone is the green of the season of Trinity, to be replaced by the purple of Advent. Gone are the flowers - they will be gone until we approach the festival of Christmas. We begin once again our cycle of readings, we embark once again on our weekly hearing of the Christian story, the ministry of John the Baptist, announcing the coming of Jesus, his birth, his life and ministry, his death and resurrection, the coming of the Holy Spirit. Alongside this we will hear once again the Old Testament story of Creation, of Fall, of the story of Moses, the story of slavery and redemption, the teachings of the great prophets. We are, in the words of the old Collect invited to ‘read, mark, learn and inwardly digest, that, through patience and comfort of your holy word, we may embrace and for ever hold fast the blessed hope of everlasting life.’ In this year by year hearing of the story, this ongoing reflection on the great themes of our redemption, we are invited to make this story our story.

In a hymn from Thanks and Praise that we are using as our offertory at the 11:00 service (which is printed on the Lesson sheets), the hymn writer puts this beautifully,

Nourish us with sacred story,
till we claim it as our own.

In our Old Testament lesson this morning, from the book of the prophet Isaiah, a passage that looks beyond the present sorry state of the city of Jerusalem, a

place of national pride, self sufficiency, self serving religion; that looks through the eyes of God, to see what is to be that is not yet.'

These are words written for their time, a particular crisis in the life of a particular people. But they are a message for all time, they are a message for our time.

The prophet declares:

He will teach us his ways,
so that we may walk in his paths.”

Nourish us with sacred story,
till we claim it as our own.

Advent is a season of preparation, preparation to celebrate Christmas, preparing for the Kingdom.

Going back to last Sunday, the end of the Christian year, we reflected on those words of Paul to the Colossians as he spoke of Jesus:

‘He is the image of the invisible God’ and alongside them words of Bishop David Jenkins, ‘Jesus is the face of God towards us; God with us, God for us.’

As I continue to reflect on this my mind goes back to the very beginning of the story, the first of the Creation narratives given to us in the Book Genesis, as the writer speaks of man

So God created humankind in his image,
in the image of God he created them;
male and female he created them. Genesis 1:27

Jesus as the image of God; you and me created in the image of God. We see in Jesus, not just the image of the invisible God, we see in the person of Jesus

humanity, my humanity, your humanity, as God always intended it to be. This is where this story becomes my story. It is not the distant story of mythical forbears, it becomes the story of what I am called to be.

And so our hymn continues

2 Turn our worship into witness
in the sacrament of life;
send us forth to love and serve you,
bringing peace where there is strife.
Give us, Christ, your great compassion
to forgive as you forgave;

Part of my calling, part of what I am meant to be as one made in the image of God, as one baptised in the name of him who is the image of the invisible God. We are called to be not bystanders but active participants in the story of Christ coming into the world. We are called to make Christ present, to be the hands, the lips, the feet of Christ in the world in which we live.

Lord, make me an instrument of your peace.
Where there is hatred, let me sow love;
where there is injury, pardon;
where there is doubt, faith;
where there is despair, hope;
where there is darkness, light;
and where there is sadness, joy.

O Divine Master, grant that I may not so much seek
to be consoled as to console;
to be understood as to understand;
to be loved as to love.
For it is in giving that we receive;
it is in pardoning that we are pardoned;
and it is in dying that we are born to eternal life. Amen