

**The Cathedral Church of the Redeemer**  
**Advent Sunday, year 'B'**  
**27 November 2011**  
**The Rev'd Leighton Lee**

---

Advent Sunday marks the beginning of the Christian year. This raises, in my mind at least, a question: what does the beginning of another year mean? Does it really mean anything more than a date in a calendar? Aren't we just going around once again? Isn't it the same old story with the same old tunes? Isn't life pretty much a matter of routine, sometimes interrupted by a crisis of some kind or other, or by an event of unexpected joy that is eventually overtaken by the routine of living?

There are many people who say that life and time are a great wheel that goes around in a circle – perhaps an unimaginably huge circle, but a circle nonetheless – which eventually winds up where it began, and then begins another long rotation. We might call this the cyclical view of history, and we know that there have been, and still are, many people who believe that there is nothing really new under the sun, that we've been here before and will be again, and that there's no chance of escape.

But the Christian view of life and history is not circular. The Christian view says life does *not* go around in circles and time does *not* go in cycles, but is always moving forward with purpose. Time has a beginning and will have an end, and it is moving on, in ways that are difficult to see and understand, toward the end. It is not like a merry-go-round; it is more like a march. And you and I are being swept along by the march of time. I suspect that many of us *hate* this, because it means we're getting older, getting closer to the end of our own time on this earth. There is so much that we have yet to do, so many unfulfilled hopes, so many dreams deferred and promises broken. We've been stuck in the same dead-end job as the years rolled on and our incentive and ingenuity shrivelled up. Or maybe we've been too lazy, always promising to do "it" – get a new job, lose weight, stop drinking, make peace with our estranged brother – and have seen the years slip by like sand through our fingers. Perhaps we've dwelt too much on the past, either on some distant life-defining glory or, more likely, on some hurt, some wrong, some failure, and find that life has passed us by.

Nonetheless, every year brings something new to each of us. It may not be what we want – we all know that – but whether it is sorrow or joy, every year we are given a new opportunity to move forward, to go further and deeper into the meaning, not only of our own lives, but also of existence itself. Not only are we growing older every year, we are also growing in experience and understanding, and at our best we are growing in the realization of the people we were meant to be; we are growing up. No matter how old we may be, we can continue to mature with every passing year, for no matter how old we are, how infirm we are, how many faculties we have lost, every year gives us an opportunity to do this – if we want to.

This is a way of looking at things that comes from a way of knowing God. Our ancient forebears knew God in a fundamentally different way than their contemporaries did. They didn't think of him as the Unmoved Mover, as the Greeks did. They thought of him as the Mover of the Unmoved. They saw him doing things, working things out, and saw him behind everything in history, whether it was the great sweep and saga of the world, or the intimate and private lives of each and every person. And when Christ was born, they thought this was the most decisive move God ever made. It was a move to heal the deepest wound in human beings, the wound made by sin and guilt. It was a move to become involved himself in the entanglements of human existence, in things like families, and religions, and violence and hatred, suffering and death, and to become so thoroughly involved in these things that he could take them up and heal the wound.

So when I say that the Christian view of life and the world is always moving ahead toward a purpose, that life is going somewhere and we are going somewhere, it is because God once went somewhere. He came here to do something for us, to heal our wounds, to give us the confidence that we need to face the future without fear. He comes here now, in very different ways, of course, in different guises, but he comes here now, and he asks us to go with him.

He asks us to go with him deeper into our own lives, into those dark and shrivelled places of our pain, regret and self-pity, those places within ourselves where we harbour hatred, doubt and fear, but where we also keep hidden love, hope and confidence. He asks us to stop telling ourselves the stories we've been telling all our lives – stories of disappointment, failure, betrayal, rejection and grief – and to listen instead to the story that he tells: our lives have a purpose more noble and joyful than could ever be believed, and there is something unique and precious only we can contribute to the world. He asks us to stop sitting still and looking into the dark and cluttered corner of the room we call life and turn around and walk through the door into the world with its infinite horizon that promises hope and healing.

He asks us, ultimately, to let go of the past – whether it be joyful or sorrowful – and to stop regretting the time wasted, lost or stolen from us. He asks us not to dread the future, but to look forward to it with anticipation, even if that future is of another world into which we go only through death. This doesn't mean we should laugh off the present time. Indeed not! It means that we realize that we have only this one wild and precious life, and to spend it in regretful and longing lookings-back is to waste it. Who knows how much time you or I may have? We don't know. But this we *do* know: it is never too late to be loving, brave, accepting, courageous, generous and forgiving. Whatever time we have left, be it days or months or years, we have enough time to live truly and to love fully. Let go of the past – be it joyful or sorrowful – and open your arms to the surprising future of God's love, which even now is born among us and within us.

*Help us, O God, to be free from the tyranny of the past. Give us the strength to put behind past pain, regret and failure. Enable us to turn ourselves to the future. Open our arms and hearts to receive the future as your unimaginable promise. And help us to prepare ourselves for your Son's coming again.*