

Year A, November 27, 2016
1 Advent
Christ Church, Mexia

I had the great pleasure of spending this past week with our son in San Diego after his return from overseas deployment. On Wednesday, we were able to play a round of golf to maximize our enjoyment of the wonderful weather there. On the back nine as we were playing down one fairway, I noticed a number of small ducks waddling down the adjacent fairway, enjoying feeding together. After we played the hole, we went to the tee box to play down the fairway on which I had observed the ducks – they were far away so they may have been coots rather than ducks. Anyway, all of a sudden, they took flight going in all directions. Then I saw a large bird, a hawk I believe, flying out of the midst of birds. I couldn't see clearly, but it looked like he may have had one of the coots in his grasp as he flew to the top of a tall pine tree along the fairway. After we hit our balls we got into the golf carts and ended up under the pine trees. I scoured the top of the tree expecting to see the hawk feasting on its prey, but I didn't see anything. Then after hitting again and driving our cart close to the green, I looked back and I saw a small coot wobbling away from the pine trees across the fairway, looking a little shaky, feathers sticking up on its back, but entering the water of the adjacent pond and being reunited with her loved ones who had gathered there after the attack. And then I thought maybe that the coot was like us, making our way through life, hoping to overcome the trials and tribulations and live the best we can. We all need hope.

And we need to be prepared. That's the other part of the message this morning. Well, it is one thing to prepare for something we know is going to happen, like the day of a wedding. We know when to order and send the invitations, when to order the cake, book the reception and music, etc. But what happens when you don't know the time – like a thief in the night or the second coming? How do we prepare then?

Well, I was in an automobile accident many years ago. It was nothing for which I was prepared specifically, but as it unfolded, I realized that the car would hit a tree beside the road, that it would hit on the right side of the front and that at the speed we were traveling that would cause the car to turn sideways and then begin to roll over. I knew these things because of physics and engineering courses I'd had. I also knew that since I had no seat belt, I would break the windshield on impact; the driver would be stopped by the steering wheel. My

parachute training in the Army prepared me to relax when impact was about to happen, to lessen the chance of breaking bones. So I put my hands and arms in front of my face to protect it, it was such a handsome face, and took a deep breath. What I had learned before allowed me to envision what would happen and to prepare for it in just a matter of seconds. So, I think it is important that we prepare ourselves spiritually now, if we are to be ready for the second coming.

Now let me return to the story of the coots for just a moment. Once the coot had been grabbed by the predator, none of the others tried to help – they just went about their business, seemingly unconcerned. That happens a lot among prey animals. It stood in stark contrast to how we were playing golf. Even though we had been assigned to play with a pair of strangers we encouraged each other, helped each other during the game. It was a stark contrast to the action of the coots. However, I do remember seeing a filmed event where a young water buffalo had been brought down by 3-4 lions. At first the herd scattered but then reassembled near the lions, bleating “encouragement” maybe (?) to the one that was caught. After a brief exchange among the water buffalo they began to move toward the lions in a shoulder-to-shoulder formation until the lions scattered and the downed buffalo was freed and returned to the herd, injured but alive. So, I guess such behavior is possible among animals. Certainly, it is true for humans. I remember visiting with John McCain after he was released from his seven years of captivity by the North Vietnamese. We can only imagine how much hope would be needed to survive something like that – the physical and mental torture and the long years of isolation and imprisonment. But the prisoners invented ways of communicating with each other, sharing news and encouragement. They wouldn’t have been able to survive otherwise.

Advent is the season of hope, a season to remind us that we worship the God of things that are not yet, the God of things that will be. We must remind ourselves that Jesus became human and came into the chaos of this world to show us how to navigate our way through it using love and compassion.

Br. Curtis (SSJE) reminds us that “(r)ather than experiencing the sorrows of our world as a source of desolation, (We should) hear the news as a clarion call, as motivation and clarification for what we are to be about as followers of Jesus Christ – to bear the beams of God’s love and light and life, especially to those who wouldn’t otherwise know it.” Share your hope.

In the name of the one God, the Creator, the Word and the Spirit.
Amen.