

May I speak in the name of God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.

We're in the second week of Advent now, and Advent is a time of creative tension. I'm not talking about the tension that comes with getting ready for Christmas, organizing the family, getting presents, putting up the decorations, and all that. That's not creative, that's often just tension. I'm talking about the tension between the now and the not yet that we experience in Advent, which actually is the center of our attention.

In Advent, we are mindful that we live between the times. We're casting our minds forward to that great day at the end of time when Jesus will come again on clouds of glory and establish his kingdom, whilst at the same time, we can't help but think about his first coming as a baby in Bethlehem. We're thinking about the future while not losing sight of the importance of the present moments. We're trying to live our lives now in the light of the coming consummation.

And this tension comes out strongly in the epistle we've just heard from the Book of Romans. St. Paul tells his readers to wake up, be ready for the day, which is near, he says. And then in the next verse, he tells them to live honorably in the day. This may have caused his first readers some confusion. They could have thought how can I live in a day which is yet to come? They had to get used to the tension between the now and the not yet, to living between the times Jesus has come and he will come again.

In last week's sermon, if you were here, I was talking about, mostly about the not yet aspect of Advent, the end of time, which is yet to come. But if we are to have a proper understanding of time and our place in time, we need to balance and hold in tension the importance of the not yet with the significance of now, the present time. We see that in the reading from St. Paul, he tells his reader to focus on the present. "Now is the moment," he says, and he's writing in the present tense when he says, "Live honorably in the day."

There's a strong biblical tradition of what might be called the sacrament of the present moment. There's that beautiful passage in the Old Testament in Ecclesiastes that begins, "For everything there is a season, a time to be born and a time to die." And it concludes, "God made everything beautiful in its time." And Jesus too emphasizes the importance of the present moment when he says in the sermon on the mount, "Don't be anxious about tomorrow, let the worries of today be enough for the day."

In a Christian understanding of time, we pay attention to the importance of now, the present moment. And at the same time, we are mindful of the importance of the end of time, which is yet to come. We understand the mystery of time by holding together in creative tension the now and the not yet. And so much thinking as Christians follows a similar pattern. In Advent, we're thinking about God acting in dramatic fashion to establish his kingdom in all the earth at the end of time, as we are preparing for his coming. And at the same time, we're looking forward to celebrating God's first coming in the baby Jesus in Bethlehem.

For us to have a distinctly Christian understanding of God, we need to hold these two truths together, the God who created the world, who will one day act to bring it to its fulfillment is most clearly visible in the form of a vulnerable baby. And much of our Christian teaching requires us to hold things together in creative tension, just as we hold together that picture of God as creator and God as baby.

Think about the person of Jesus Christ, who's at the center of our faith, to understand the person of Christ properly we need to see him as fully human and fully divine. And we can't see where his humanity ends or his divinity begins, we have to see both things at the same time. God is in Christ is fully human and fully divine. Think too about the Bible. It is at the same time a divinely inspired text and also a work of human hands. The spirit of God inspired the text, but human authors wrote it,

edited it, and gathered together in councils to decide what books should go in the Bible.

If we see the Bible only as a human creation, it would just be another ancient historical document. And if we emphasized only it being divinely inspired, we'd have slipped into an un-Christian kind of fundamentalism. If we are to understand the Bible aright, we need to hold together the fact that it's both God breathed, and humanly written. We live in a culture that wants to reduce everything to black and white, either or, and in Advent, we are reminded that in the church we're called to resist that trend. We hold things together in tension.

And just in case you think this is an example of the church's escapism from reality, science has now finally caught up and says the same thing. It's a well-established principle in quantum mechanics, and I should say that I know nothing about quantum mechanics. All I know about quantum mechanics I've got from Wikipedia, but it is true that in quantum mechanics, every particle entity may be described as either a particle or a wave. It expresses the inability of the classical concept of particle and wave to fully describe the behavior of quantum scale objects.

So, Einstein says this, "It seems as though we must use sometimes the one theory and sometimes the other, while at times we may use either. We are faced with a new kind of difficulty. We have two contradictory pictures of reality, separately neither of them fully explains the phenomenon of light, but together they do." And when he talks like that, Einstein could be describing any of the issues that I've been talking about so far in this sermon.

I think that my thinking this week has taken a bit of a philosophical turn because I've been thinking about space travel in the light of our visit from Bruce McCandless III this week, and I've read his book. It's hard to balance the infinite dimensions of space with the mundane concerns of our daily life. It's not easy to maintain a healthy balanced perspective on life. This came home to me when I

was recently reading an article or an interview with William Shatner, better known as Captain Kirk from Star Trek. You may remember that he's been into space recently, he went up with Elon Musk. And he spoke eloquently in this interview about the experience, the wonder, and the mystery of real space travel, not just on the Starship Enterprise, and how this experience had changed his life. The interviewer asked if he'd do it again. And he said, he thought, and he said, "Well, I'm sitting here with my wife eating a lovely egg sandwich. I think not."

Captain Kirk had succeeded enjoying the moment whilst retaining the perspective of eternity, and that's something we could all aim to do in this. Advent season. In Advent, we consider the tension between the now and the not yet. We resolve to live in the day, knowing that the day is almost here. Amen.