

Sunday, December 7, 2014
Rev. Diane Monti-Catania

Sermon - Living on Leftovers

I don't know about you, but we had the benefit of Thanksgiving leftovers right through until last Tuesday.

Each night we would take a few more helpings out of the refrigerator and warm them up.

It was easy.

We didn't have to think about what to have for dinner, didn't have to shop, had little to do in the way of preparation or clean up.

It was a break from our usual intentional dinner planning, preparation and sharing.

By Tuesday, I missed the regular routine.

I suspect that if we always had leftovers, we might get lazy.

As I was ruminating on the change of routine these leftovers wrought, I began to think about all the ways we have fallen into a 'leftover' mentality.

From the beginning of scripture God has told us that we are to bring the first fruits of our labor as an offering to the Lord.

But we don't.

We bring the last fruits.

Most often, we make sure that everything we want or need is taken care of and then we decide to give a part of what is left to the church.

We make an assumption that someone else will step up and provide the resources needed to ensure that the church will be here.

We take the same approach with our time.

We know that we ought to visit the sick or volunteer time to help the poor, but at the end of a busy day, after work and carpools and a myriad of activities, we are simply too depleted to give anything else.

If we give it any thought at all, we hope that someone else is volunteering for a committee or cleaning up the environment, or visiting our elderly aunt.

If we do muster up the energy to do these things, it is often with our leftover stamina, not our first fruit.

On this second Sunday of Advent, a day when we celebrate Peace – the peace that Christ brings, I have to acknowledge that even when we work for peace, it is often the leftovers that we bring to the table.

I don't think there has ever been a time in history when the entire world has been at peace.

We speak of peace, we pray for peace, but our society has been structured in such a way that we delegate the work of peace to others.

By eliminating the draft in this country we have shifted much of the sacrifice of war to our marginalized populations.

As a country, when we negotiate peace, we are backed by a \$600 billion dollar defense budget.

Peace – what is peace?

What would it mean if the world were at peace?

Imagine what we could do with the resources we spend on keeping peace?

What if all the money that has been spent on law enforcement – keeping the peace - in Ferguson, Missouri or New York City last week, was spent on improving the lives, living conditions and educational opportunities of our country's young black men?

I think of the photos of some of the rebels I see fighting in other countries and I can't help but recognize that they look like the description of John the Baptist: "Now John was clothed with camel's hair, with a leather belt around his waist and he ate locusts and wild honey."

John the Baptist was the bridge between the Old Testament prophets and the new order proclaimed and demonstrated by Jesus.

With his announcement of the coming Messiah, John showed that something new was happening.

In the act of baptizing people, he showed that this new order was not based on ancestry, religious affiliation or national citizenship.

You were in if you made the conscious choice to turn away from the values, priorities and behaviors of the past and embraced a new way that included all people in God's work.

Repentance, remember means a gentle turning – a turning from old to new.

A turning from violence to peace.

Jesus offered this new way throughout his ministry.

A way of love. A way of peace.

Peace...what does peace look like?

Psalm 85 describes a time when steadfast love and faithfulness will meet; righteousness and peace will kiss each other.

Isaiah prophesied a future where God would feed his flocks like a shepherd, gathering his lambs in his arms, leading gently.

Gentle, tender leadership is what Jesus modeled.

Jesus, our prince of peace, calls us to share in his peace by living gentle lives, by treating each other tenderly.

“Peace Be With You” was the post resurrection greeting Jesus used when he visited his disciples.

The word peace is found almost 100 times in the New Testament.

It was a concept that Jesus loved, offering his peace to the marginalized, to the lost, to the forgotten.

How can our lives reflect this value?
What do we need to do to be called ‘peacemakers?’

I think it starts with humility.

It’s not about us – it is always about imitating Christ and serving God.

Humility, strengthened by total unselfish commitment to God.

Humility lived out as an unconditional acceptance of our neighbors.

Our bible study materials used the acronym EGO for “Edging God Out.”

We start by remembering that Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior came to this world as a baby.

A baby born to parents who were powerless, oppressed, marginalized.

Jesus: the baby in the manger – humble, vulnerable, dependent.

We remember Jesus’ ministry – we look to our advent candles and remember that Jesus stood for hope, peace, joy and love.

And then we remember how Jesus left this life.

Jesus: the man hanging on a cross – Total humility; total commitment.

One of the great practices of faith that helps us to open to God's work anew each day is remembering.

When we take time to reflect and remember what God has done for us and others in the past, we are more able to open our hearts for what God may be seeking to do in us now.

We come to this communion table to feast on the bread of life – to drink from the cup of joy.

We come with total commitment.

This bread and this wine are sacred reminders of all that is good in the world.

These are not leftovers.

This is sustenance for life's journey.

To eat at this table requires that we bring our whole being.

We come to this table of thanksgiving, to honor the one born in the manger.

We come to this table to remember, to recommit, and to reorder our lives.

We come as a community dedicated to peace – the peace that Christ brings into our lives.

Let us join our hearts and our souls at Christ's table.