

Today marks the beginning of the Advent season .  
We will sing and pray for the next few Sundays  
at the beginning of each service  
“Oh come oh come Emanuel!”

The word Emmanuel is Hebrew for  
God with us.

How is God going to come to us?

We begin this month thinking about Jesus  
coming again in clouds of glory.

It's a gigantic scene  
Worthy of George Lucas.

The judgment of the sheep and the goats from last Sunday  
is to be preceded by what's described in today's reading:  
empire wide persecutions–  
Widespread evil and wickedness –  
cataclysmic events among the nations  
like war and social chaos  
mirrored in the creation  
by falling stars and earthquakes and upheaval.

That image of the end times  
has always caught our attention -  
even if we don't believe in it.

I love post apocalyptic movies  
like The Road  
and beyond ThunderDome  
and the Terminator series.

What they all have in common  
is that they force us to think about  
what life is really like for us  
here and now.

There is inside all of the storylines  
a vaguely perceptible but distinct yearning  
for something more,  
something to improve our lives,

something to help us live today.

And that is precisely the purpose of Advent –  
to help us look realistically at  
and live successfully today.

These four weeks  
Are the gestation period  
for Christ within us...  
when divinity begins and continues to grow in us

For Christ was not only born in Bethlehem in Judea  
at the turn of the last epoch,  
Christ will not only come again  
In some undetermined future.  
Both of those are true.

But Christ is being born in each of us right now.  
This is why Christ came to earth:  
God became human, so that we might become God.

How does that happen?

It begins almost silently,  
like a spark of light within us.

Like the beginning of all human life  
the mothers womb where two very different cells  
become one and the third thing,  
a new thing ,  
and we are conceived.

So it is with our spiritual life.

From a very small beginning,  
the birth process, our baptism,  
a chance encounter with someone who shares compassion with us,  
from these moments are born  
the gratitude toward life's gifts  
and the self giving service  
which are hallmarks of God's presence in our world.

These are the seeds from which the Christ grows within.

Like all life,  
the life of Christ within needs to be nurtured and cultivated.

In order for us to become like God  
we need to become a self-contained,  
as peaceful,  
as loving,  
as we know God to be.

For in the midst of God' s Activity of  
creating, redeeming, sanctifying,  
there is at the very center stillness and a heart.

When we find that still place within ourselves  
we have found God growing with in us.

That is what this quiet time of Advent is about.

Like pregnancy and birth –  
it can be difficult, awkward, complicated.

Like pregnancy and birth,  
it for sure bring great pain,  
but it results in even greater joy.

I am asking each of us to do two things this Advent.

Yes, I know many of us are busy with holiday prep.  
But hear me out.

The first is a gratitude list.  
Sit down and write a list of gifts  
that you have been given by the universe.

I won't even begin to recount those for you –  
that's your job-  
And each of our lists will be quite different.

But here is some items from my own list to prime your pump:

1. Two good jobs- the chance to do two things I love doing
2. Two wonderful families- mine and the Rolfzens who live with me
3. Relative good health
4. Enough money to get to the end of each month
5. My dog Theodore Roosevelt Boelter- more commonly known as Teddy

You get the idea.  
 Give yourself a good half hour alone  
 in a quiet place-  
 a chapel or church or conference room or coffee house.

Journal those gratitude gifts –  
 sit quietly in between if the ideas stop coming.  
 Sometimes it takes some time  
 for those gifts and ideas to surface.

The second idea is service.  
 What one thing or couple of things can you do each day  
 to be of service to someone else?

No fair using stuff you already do-  
 And I know many of you do a lot for your families, church and community.

Look for at least one small thing you can do.  
 one small thing a day –  
 for someone else –  
 preferably without that person necessarily knowing.

Buy someone's coffee,  
 Open a door for them,  
 Leave an encouraging note.

If we do these two things:  
 Develop our sense of gratitude  
 Cultivate a life of service.

Then we will remember why we are here –  
 We exist to live the compassion of God,  
 To bring it to light in our own lives  
 and those around us  
 By helping others.

Our gratitude list shows us how God has already done that for us.

Our service gets us into the flow  
 of compassion, of God, Of giving –  
 all of which are very much the same thing.  
 And Emanuel will come this Advent season.  
 Amen.