

Salvation, Sanctification and Service

Marley was dead: to begin with. There is no doubt whatever about that. The register of his burial was signed by the clergyman, the clerk, the undertaker, and the chief mourner. Scrooge signed it: and Scrooge's name was good upon 'Change, for anything he chose to put his hand to. Old Marley was as dead as a door-nail.

Scrooge knew he was dead? Of course he did. How could it be otherwise? Scrooge and he were partners for I don't know how many years. Scrooge was his sole executor, his sole administrator, his sole assign, his sole residuary legatee, his sole friend and sole mourner.

The mention of Marley's funeral brings me back to the point I started from. There is no doubt that Marley was dead. This must be distinctly understood, or nothing wonderful can come of the story I am going to relate.

The ghost of Marley came in the early evening and appeared to Scrooge. After finally convincing him of his existence he told him of the misery of his existence. He explained his eternal misery was a result of his life lived on earth. He told Scrooge to change while he had the chance. To that end Scrooge was to expect three ghostly visitors, the first coming at one am. Scrooge politely declined only to learn that the visits were not an option. He returned to the warmth of his bed, drew the bed-curtains and pulled the covers up over his head. He woke to the sounds of a bell ringing one o'clock. The ghost of Christmas past came as Marley said he would, drawing back the curtains he said "I am here for your reclamation." Though Scrooge protested Christmas past persisted; "Rise and walk with me."

In a way just as the ghostly figure of Christmas past presses Scrooge to rise from sleep and walk with it so we hear St. Paul tell the saints of the Church of Rome, "You know what time it is! It is Now the hour for you to wake from sleep, for our salvation is closer than when we first accepted the faith."

Paul has caught the saints of the Church of Rome napping and desires to rouse them to consciousness and conversion. We hear in this epistle a common thread of expectation and hope found in other epistles. The early Christian communities lived in expectation that Jesus was going to return soon. Alongside this hope and expectation Paul chides members of the community who are idle, and slipping into drunkenness, licentiousness.

We begin the season of advent waiting, expectation and hope with an urgent question being asked of us. Having accepted Jesus as savior have we accepted him as Lord of our lives?

How is our salvation closer than when we first accepted the faith? When we were baptized whether as an infant or later on we were “all baptized into the death of Jesus Christ that we may live in the power of his resurrection and look for him to come again in glory.” Whether at baptism or later in our life each of us must decide to accept the faith that Jesus is our savior.

Accepting Jesus as Lord of our life means making small and large decisions each day that flow from his righteousness not our own desires or fears. I suppose that at one time or other there is something we would rather not give up to Jesus. It could be a relationship, a habit, a behavior of silence when we ought to speak, a job that takes us away from God’s love and loving others. Like Scrooge we may protest “I’d rather not. I’m too old, past change, past fixing.”

The advent question like the clock striking one for Old Scrooge sounds loudly in my spirit: What would be different in my life if I accepted Jesus as Lord in those places I hold back from Him? Jesus longs to sanctify the aspects of our lives we hold back from him individually and as a community. It is no ghostly visitor but Jesus himself who bids us wake up, Rise and walk.

Jesus gave his life for us, that he might give his life to us, so that he can live his life through us.

Accepting him as Savior and Lord, we are sanctified by his grace for a purpose, for service. When the bishop consecrates

chrism used at baptism the bishop prays “Eternal Father, whose blessed Son was anointed by the Holy Spirit to be the Savior and servant of all, we pray you to consecrate this oil, that those who are sealed with it may share in the royal priesthood of Jesus Christ...”

Allowing Jesus to draw us to himself and lead us where he needs us to be in our families, among our friends, Christ Church for one another and for the community of Tarrytown, nation and world he empowers us for service in His royal priesthood. As we begin advent let us each individually and as the community of Christ Church courageously look inward and ask the Holy Spirit if there is a place where we are not allowing Jesus to be Lord of our lives and resolve to make this place in ourselves our Christmas gift to Him. **“You know what time it is! It is Now the hour for you to wake from sleep, for our salvation is closer than when we first accepted the faith.”**