

Pr. Ben Adams
November 24, 2018
Last Sunday of the Year

At the Doorstep

Doorways are interesting things. In one way they are thresholds in, into private sanctuary like spaces where we rest, eat, play, and live. But in another way, they are gateways out, out into the big wide world that is full of mystery, opportunity, and chaos. When we stand at the doorstep with what we know behind us and what we don't know in front of us, new worlds beckon for us to come out of our safe sanctuary-like spaces to participate in what is to come.

In many ways this evening we are standing at the doorstep. Today marks the end of another church year and we stand at the doorstep of a new advent, a season of waiting with a longing anticipation for the reign of Christ that comes to us in real time in real ways incarnate of the same dirt and flesh and blood as you and I.

What will we experience as we step out across the threshold into a new church year and into an ever-changing world? What do we anticipate or hope for in this new church year? What hesitation might we have in stepping out?

There's a lot right now that has been brought to our very own Chicago doorstep that might cause us to hesitate instead of hope. Tragedies like the mass shooting at Mercy Hospital last week, or the all too common news of yet another police shooting of a black man, this time the victim was Jemel Roberson, a heroic security guard, doing his job of subduing an active shooter who entered the bar Jemel was hired to protect, yet when police arrived to the scene, no such protection was provided to Jemel. Instead, Jemel was shot on sight.

These acts of senseless gun violence on our very own doorstep may make us want to just take a step back from the threshold of the doorway and retreat back into the sanctuary-like spaces we know. But as people of faith, what is our call, what is our response to the senseless death on our very own doorstep?

In his testimony before Pilate just before his crucifixion, Jesus says in our Gospel today, "For this I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone who belongs to the truth listens to my voice."

Death is on the doorstep for Jesus in this moment and Jesus testifies to the truth. As people of faith we are people who listen to the voice of Jesus and we are called to respond to that voice. But the noise of the world can be hard to hear over and there are times we may fall into hesitation instead of hope by the evil and death on our doorstep, but today as we step over the threshold of our doorstep into a church new year we are reminded of our call to follow Jesus and testify to the truth that goodness is stronger than evil and life is stronger than death.

As we step into advent, we begin our season of waiting where we wait with longing hope that the reign of truth will come to us to set us free. No longer will we be controlled or compelled to hesitate because of the seeming power wielded by the reign of fear, or evil, or death, or lies. The reign of truth liberates us to love without hesitation.

And we not only enter a new church season next week, but we are making our way from fall into winter in the Midwest. And I love this time of year, this liminal space where the trees teach us so much. What I mean by that is in this Autumn season we can learn from the trees that are in the final stages of letting go. The beautiful leaves that have filled the branches of our oaks, maples, and ginkgos are falling or have fallen. And while it looks like a death of sorts for each tree as its leaves change and fall, what the trees teach us is how to let go and move through the

threshold into a new year. Falling leaves is not a sign of surrender to death, but a hopeful testament to the truth that life is stronger than death, and there is a season for everything.

Right now Tara and I are fostering a three month old puppy named Sadie, and while it's fun to have a puppy around the house to snuggle with and play with, it has meant lots of trips outside to prevent accidents in the house, so needless to say, I've had a lot of time to bask in this Autumn wonderland where time seems to slow down and the trees are letting go.

And it's been fun to see how a three month old puppy encounters the world. Because to Sadie, everything is new, every experience is another threshold into the unknown. And Sadie is a fearless pup. She doesn't hesitate at any threshold, but instead charges into each new moment of life with an unbreakable hope and youthful energy that just screams innocence and youth, but it also looks like what I think liberation looks like.

Sadie doesn't see what's on the doorstep and retreat, but she moves over the threshold towards the new thing on her doorstep and discovers what is waiting for her with excitement and curiosity. It's funny to think but I have learned a lot about hope from her over this past week we've had her.

But there are things we do stop her from doing like licking the knives in the dishwasher or eating things off the ground that would hurt her. The world can be a dangerous place for an eager pup and the same is true for us. The world can be a dangerous place but in the face of such seeming danger we are liberated by the truth of our baptism that the resurrection is real and that we have been made one with Christ who takes us from death to life and from our hesitation to hope.

At the South Loop Community table, the meal the South Loop Campus Ministry serves with our partners, The Inclusive Collective at UIC, we routinely debrief our experiences from each Sunday night meal and each debrief ends with a blessing and each of our campus ministries has a different way of blessing the group at the end of each night. For the South Loop Campus Ministry we use a beautiful Franciscan Blessing, but for the Inclusive Collective they use a blessing that is adapted from a Steven Shoemaker Benediction and I think it is worthwhile to share with you as we stand at the doorstep of a new church year. It goes like this:

May the Lord Bless You and Keep You;
May the Lord's Face Shine Upon You
And Be Gracious Unto You.
May God Give You the Grace
To never Sell Yourself Short,
the Grace to Risk Something Big
For Something Good,
the Grace to Remember that
This World is Now
Too Dangerous for Anything but Truth, and
Too Small for Anything but Love.
So May God Take Your Minds and
Think Through Them;
May God Take Your Lips and
Speak Through Them; may God take your hands and work through them, and
May God Take Your Hearts and
Set Them On Fire,
Amen.

Did you hear that line? May God give you the grace to remember that this world is now too dangerous for anything but truth. There is so much at the doorstep that could cause us to hesitate, but as people who belong to the truth, we listen to the voice of Jesus who is calling us over the threshold, from this church year to the next, from one season to another, from this sanctuary space into the world. And God gives us the grace fully and freely to cross that threshold. So let us be bold in our faith as we go out and testify to the truth because this world is now too dangerous for anything but the truth. Amen.