

# Christ the Lord Episcopal Church      Pinole, CA

The Second Sunday of Advent      December 6, 2020

*“The Growing Edge”*

Rev. Dr. Lois Williams

Good Morning everyone, and here we are looking at staying at home at least until the New Year. I hope everyone is staying safe, and is doing alright. This will be a season like no other.

That being said, we have today's Gospel talking about repentance and sin. I know you, like me, may be thinking, “Forget about sin! I've been staying home; I have actually had no way to sin.” But I would like to take a moment to look at sin and repentance in light of preparing for Christmas, the coming of Christ.

Howard Thurman's reflection today focuses on faith and taking even our last effort to push forward into an unknown future, realizing everything will eventually die. But all is not lost because we are also reborn. So what does all this mean? What does Advent mean in the time of a pandemic and where does sin fall into place?

The Hebrew meaning of the word “sin”, as many already know, means missing the mark. The Hebrew people were a nomadic people and their language and lifestyle was wrapped around this culture. One of the aspects of a nomad is his constant journey from one watering hole to another and one pasture to another. If you are walking on a journey (literal or figurative) and find yourself "lost from the path," you correct yourself and get back on the path. This was a "mistake" (accidentally missing the mark), but not deliberate. This is choosing life, getting back on the path where there is water and sustenance. Once you are back on the right path, all is good.

However, if you decide to leave the path and make your own way, you are again "lost from the path", but this time, being a deliberate act, it is a purposeful mistake (missing

the mark on purpose). This is choosing death, trusting only on self for sustenance. In the Old Testament, God gives his "directions" (usually translated as "commands") for the journey that his people are to be on - to sustain life and future generations.

But back then, just as today, we often miss the mark. Biblically speaking, by the time you get through the Old Testament, the laws upon laws were piling up. For those around while John the Baptist was baptizing, the accumulation and weight of sin must have been overbearing, from eating something considered unclean, to not tithing to the temple, and everything in between.

But then there is light at the end of the journey. Jesus comes and takes those innumerable commandments and laws and simply says: "I am the game changer, I got this for you, I can shorten this list and make it more doable."

God doesn't care what you eat, what you wear, the color of your skin. God doesn't care if you are lower class or regal. God doesn't care what culture you are from. The only thing God cares about is that you love God and one another. This sustains life.

As Thurman points out, worlds are born and they die. We are born and we die. We cannot take our cars, our clothes, our homes, or any other material thing with us into the ever after. All we can take is the love.

When we are reborn into the realm beyond this world we want people to remember the love. Not the pettiness, not the greediness, not the amazing décor, or the fancy car, or the dividends left to them. We want them to remember the love. That love can take many forms: the many memories, smiles and laughs; it can be forgiveness; it can be providing care in some way; or even satisfying material needs. And if nothing else, maybe loving someone is just about saying a prayer for them.

We pray each Sunday for forgiveness for what we have done and what we have left undone. What are you doing or not doing to promote love in the context of your world? Are you sitting home fretting over broken relationships and not making a phone call? Are you angry at society or the present situation, seething? You see, we can sin while we are staying at home.

Loving God requires we care for his creation. Loving God requires we take good care of ourselves, the vessel he has given us. Loving God includes loving others through being caring, compassionate, forgiving, and searching for justice.

This is our growing edge.

The more we care, the more compassion we have, the more forgiveness we give and receive. It clears the path for a better future, for a more whole next generation.

This is living our faith. This is the basis of hope in moments of despair, the incentive to carry on when times are out of joint and men have lost their reason, the source of confidence when worlds crash and dreams whiten into ash.

This is growing in love and letting go of sin – releasing anything that breaks our relationship with God and each other (the missing of the mark.) The incentive to keep on going, to keep on trying; knowing that what we leave the next generation is something good.

The birth of the child—life's most dramatic answer to death—this is the growing edge incarnate. Look well to the growing edge! Love boldly, repent of whatever is holding you back. Have faith to see in darkness, the coming light. Amen