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Process theology sees the universe as creative, interrelational, dynamic, and open to the future. In process theology, God is relational, present in every moment of our lives and in all entities and levels of being. The world is interconnected, in effect a giant ecosystem, where what harms or blesses one, harms or blesses all.

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First Sunday of Advent

December 1, 2013

Reading 1: Isaiah 2:1-5	Reading 2: Psalm 122	Reading 3: Romans 13:11-14	Reading 4: Matthew 24:36-44
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See Also:

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By Bruce G. Epperly

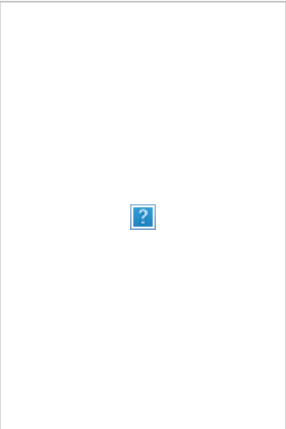
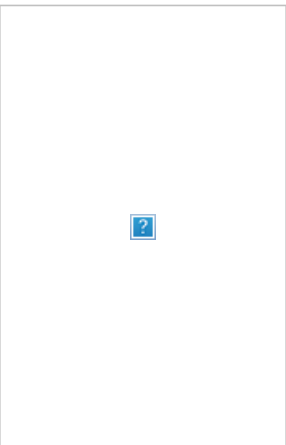
Advent is a time of awe and wonder. Great things are happening in the world and our lives. God has a dream for human history and our own moment by moment lives. History aims at incarnation. The birth and ministry of Jesus of Nazareth, continuous with the dreams of the Hebraic prophetic tradition, brings about a new array of possibilities for creative transformation. Advent is a time for agency and urgency. While some people wait for a divine rescue operation, the first Sunday of Advent asks us to be active – the scriptures invite us to walk, to go, to stay awake, to put on an armor of light, and be ready. Faithfulness to God calls us to action, based on our experience of God’s present possibilities, luring us forward toward tomorrow’s challenges.

Isaiah speaks of a gathering of the spirits in which God teaches God’s people to walk in God’s pathways. God’s way joins contemplation and action, and word and deed. Theology is always practical and is completed when we align our actions with our understanding of God’s vision of human life, the world, and the goals of history. Theology is a moving experience: it inspires us to walk in God’s pathways.

Isaiah asserts that the living God is a justice seeking God: God has the whole world in God’s hands, but also invites us to be part of a God-movement toward peace and abundance. God presents us with an amazing possibility – a provocative proposition - of swords into plowshares and spears into pruning hooks. In God’s realm, nations will abandon war and, in so doing, the hungry will be fed and dispossessed find homes. In the meantime, our vocation is to be citizens, living by a vision of the world to come.

“I was glad when they said unto me let us go unto the house of the Lord,” rejoices the Psalmist. The Jerusalem temple becomes a focal point for the nations through its vision of peace. Without peace in Jerusalem, there is no peace on Earth, the Psalmist asserts. The Psalmist commands, “pray for the peace of Jerusalem.” This is a strong admonition for progressives who often side with the Palestinians over the State of Israel. We must pray for Israel as well as Palestine; we must insure a just peace that protects Israel as well as liberates Palestine. We must go beyond polarization in the Middle East, recognizing the universality of threat, violence, and self-interest, along with the possibility of personal, national, and regional transformation. God loves the whole world, without exceptions; and God’s love embraces the diversity of nations and ethnicities, inviting them toward peace, goodness, and beauty.

William James once spoke of the moral equivalent of war, and surely this is one meaning of Paul’s words from Romans. “Put on the armor of light,” counsels the apostle Paul. Surrounded by God’s light, we are delivered from the temptation to follow the ways of death. There is nothing militaristic here; rather God’s armor is healing, warming, and



guiding. It is the armor of illumination awakening us to the nearness of salvation. We need to be ready, for the challenges of life are right here: God's vision is enhanced or diminished in each moment of experience. Noticing God's moment by moment invitation and signing on for our part in world transformation opens us to new possibilities and new freedoms in alignment with God's global vision of Shalom. God's presence in the world is related to our openness to God's moment by moment presentation of possibilities.

Putting on an armor of light involves trust in the moral arc of history, the power of ideas to transform our lives, and the energetic presence of God to transform cells as well as souls. We need to be patient: the adventures of the Spirit, may take decades and even centuries. But, still we must be active and always ready to embrace the new visions God presents to the world. There are no absolute guarantees of safety, but God's illuminating presence gives us hope that regardless of the circumstances of life, we will find our way.

Can we have eschatology without world-denying apocalyptic? Can we trust divine possibilities without the assurance of a final destination to history or divinely ordained fulfillment of history? Many Christians still await a divine rescue operation, liberating the faithful while leaving the Earth in rubble. They perceive that the brokenness of the world is irreparable. They believe that everything imperfect must be destroyed for the new Earth to appear. Moreover they are clear that God's scope of salvation is clearly demarcated, separating the sheep and the goats and the saved and unsaved, and abandoning this good Earth to destruction.

Apocalyptic history is often motivated by hopelessness in history that disdains any meaningful social transformation. Ironically, many of today's apocalyptic thinkers anticipate the destruction of the Earth, scorn environmental protection and disdain reports of global climate change, while feeling comfortable with lining their pockets as they wait for the apocalypse. There are also some apocalyptically-inclined Christians who are motivated by a sense of dominion: believing that only true Christians – defined in narrow, self-serving terms - will be saved, they seek to "lord it over" non-Christians through draconian laws regarding abortion, repealing same sex marriage, and denying rights to immigrants.

I believe that Jesus' words are eschatological rather than apocalyptic. We are in a time of crisis, a time requiring critical decision-making. The point of Jesus' words is to encourage awareness of what's going on right around us and within us. We need to be self-aware and community aware. We need to know the signs of the times and what is required of us to be faithful in this present moment. God's vision is always relational and concrete – it comes to us in real time and space – and always evolving along with in relationship with our own responsiveness. In the dynamic call and response of life, God's invitation comes moment by moment.

Understood from a process perspective, eschatological thinking refers God's aim for each moment: God provides possibilities and the energy to achieve them. Each moment is decisive for us and for others. Our collective decisions bring life or death to countless persons, animal companions, and the ambient environment.

The process-relational preacher can invite her or his congregation to take action in global transformation. We can be local congregations living out of a global perspective. We are living toward a vision, motivated by God's dream for us and this good earth. Possibility, energy, and adventure await us when we awaken to the possibilities emerging in every moment of life.

Bruce Epperly is Pastor of South Congregational Church, Centerville, MA. on Cape Cod. He is the author of nearly thirty books, including his most recent books, Adventurous Advent: Days of Awe and Wonder and Letters to my Grandson: Gaining Wisdom from a Fresh Perspective. He may be contacted for conversation and engagements at drbruceepperly@aol.com.

Lectionary Commentary **a just peace** **agency vs. urgency** **eschatological rather than**
apocalyptic **justice seeking God** **living toward a vision** **peace and abundance** **William**
James **Bruce G. Epperly**

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