

Advent 1 (HC-Epistle) (2018)

I was seated in the departure lounge of an airport in England – maybe Heathrow.

Out the plate-glass window, I stared into a grey sky. In the distance I could see an equally grey church spire, atop of which was a cockerel.

Why a rooster I wondered?

As I sat there, I thought of Peter's great fall. How on the night of Jesus' arrest, in the court of the high priest's house, he had denied he knew his Lord, not once, but three times.

And, how the sound of the rooster crowing at daybreak had woken him to his sin and brought back words Jesus had spoken at the Last Supper:

“Verily I say unto thee, That this night, before the cock crow, thou shalt deny me thrice” (Matthew 26:34).

Maybe that was what that rooster was saying: **Wake up to your failures and to turn back to God.**

A good message. One we all need to hear from time to time.

As I continued to look out that window, I thought of a second option. It was this:

The Old Testament prophets frequently spoke of a new day, a day in which God would send a Saviour.

Isaiah was one of those prophets. Speaking of this new day, he wrote:

“Awake, awake; put on thy strength, O Zion; put on thy beautiful garments, O Jerusalem . . .” (52:1).

Just perhaps that was the message this rooster was intended to convey:

Wake up. The day spoken of by Isaiah has arrived. A Saviour has been born.

Two possible options, but I don't know that we have to choose between them. No doubt both are true and needed.

That rooster reminds us to wake up to our own failures and, in the words of this morning's Epistle, to "cast off the works of darkness."

At the same time, he reminds us that God's new day has dawned. A Saviour has been born. Death itself is now a defeated enemy.

Again, I don't think we have to choose between these two options.

But what else might this old rooster be telling us?

Might it not be the same message Paul sounds forth in this morning's Epistle when he writes:

"It is high time to awake out of sleep: for now is our salvation nearer than when we believed."

In this passage Paul seems to be addressing former pagans who had receive the Christian Gospel. After all, he speaks specifically of "casting off" certain behaviours all too common out there in the ancient Greco-Roman world.

One of these concerned unrestrained sexual practices. That is what Paul has in view when he says: "not in chambering and wantonness".

"Chambering" literally means going from bedroom to bedroom.

I want to say Paul's call to a radical holiness still stands. Society at large may scoff at it. Many in the Church may ignore it. Nevertheless, God still demands it.

But, at the same time, there is a positive aspect to Paul's message. In brief, it is to love. "Love worketh no ill," he writes.

Recently, I saw a You Tube video where people at random were interviewed and asked what they thought of when they heard the word "church".

The answers received were varied and interesting:

“An old building, often very beautiful.”

“A place you go for weddings and christenings.”

“Somewhere you go to meet God and pray.”

“A place of fellowship.”

“More than a building, people.”

Actually, these responses were very gratifying. No one, for example, said:

“A bunch of hypocrites.”

“Irrelevant.”

“Out of touch.”

“Judgmental”, or anything on that order.

I wonder what people out there on the street would say about St. Luke’s?

I hope it would be something more than: **“Oh, that’s the pretty, little grey church on the corner with the red doors.”**

That’s good as far as it goes, but I would rather it be something on the order of:

“St. Luke’s? That is the church where people really love the Lord and care for each other in meaningful ways and who are always doing something for the community.”

Indeed . . . I say this humbly . . . I believe we are already part-way there.

I say this because wherever I go I have people stop me and say such things as:

“I just love St. Luke’s because of all you do for the community.”

They may have been to one of our concerts.

They may have brought their children to our annual community Easter Egg Hunt.

They may have brought their taxes here to be done by the AARP tax preparers.

Or, they may have come to yesterday’s bazaar.

It doesn’t matter. They know we are here and we are alive.

Of course, of course, we must strive to be more than “a church of nice”.

We must be a place where the Gospel is faithfully sounded forth Sunday by Sunday . . . a place sinners can find forgiveness and those already on the path may find instruction and challenge to grow into Christ-like-ness.

May we continue to strive to be such a place. ///

In conclusion, my message this morning is the same message as that of the old rooster:

It is: Wake up. Be on the lookout for new opportunities for love and service.

After all, the One who came, comes. “Our salvation is nearer than when we believed.”