

**HOMILY - 3 Advent, A 2019
by Rev. Bob Schramm, OSFS**

Advent comes at a time of year simplicity when starkness blanket everything.

The grasses are a lifeless brown, with few exceptions this late in fall.

Trees are all leafless, except for the oaks.

Most oaks have dead leaves clinging to their branches.

If you examine an oak branch, you'll also notice buds waiting to burst open when sap begins to flow again in the spring.

(hold up oak branch)

This branch is an odd reminder of both death and new life.

If you look carefully, it can help appreciate today's Advent readings.

There are lessons in the branch about patient waiting, longing and anticipation.

Those buds can be reminders that new life waits, longs to blossom even amid all the signs of decay and apparent lifelessness.

All three readings today call us to a kind of patient waiting, a kind of hopeful longing, a kind of joyful expectation, even amid signs of decay and apparent lifelessness we find around us and within.

The first reading urges us to stand on the tiptoes of our imagination.

The prophet calls on us to imagine a world

where the weak and feeble and fearful find new strength.

Isaiah urges us to dream of a world where the blind see, the deaf hear, the lame leap like a stag, and the mute sing for joy.

Isaiah urges us readers to imagine the unimaginable, to dream dreams, not out of nostalgia or naiveté,

but because those are God's dreams for our world

and because God insists that we participate in those dreams becoming reality.

The letter of James calls for patience,

the patience of farmers waiting for crops to grow.

The patience called for here

isn't an idle kind of patience.

Farmers don't plant and then wait around to see what happens.

There's a lot of cultivating, fertilizing, tending that takes place between planting and reaping.

On the other hand, farmers can't force plants to grow faster or taller.

So also, the seeds we sow take patience like that of the farmer.

The Letter of James calls for patience, a trust that the seed we plant today — the forgiveness, the compassion, the gentleness — will bear fruit tomorrow or next month or 25 years from now.

Finally, the Gospel story is all about expectations, transformed expectations — John the Baptist's expectations, the crowd's expectations and our expectations. Jesus demands that John and the crowd and we ourselves, all of us, must utterly change our expectations, if we are to enter God's reign, share in God's dream.

Jesus announces the coming of a new age in which the humblest member would be greater than John the Baptist, the greatest of all who had gone before.

In Jesus, it all gets turned inside out and upside-down. If you want to find the Savior, go look among the blind, the lame, the deaf, the lepers, the tax collectors, the prostitutes, the poorest of the poor — the mirror.

You'll find the Savior, in other words, where you're least likely to expect it. Christmas is the celebration of INCARNATION, God getting lost among us.

The least shall be first and the first shall be last.

Which brings us back to that simple, dead looking oak branch.

*May God be blessed.
Both now and forever*