



Awaiting God's Peace

December 12, 2020

Pastor Craig Lindsey

During the Interim, the Presbytery eliminated our 3rd Pastor position; and in cost savings Session eliminated the Administrator position; SO in addition to getting up to speed as Pastor, there have also been these other responsibilities, and the Pandemic. Our Sound System did not function, so we replaced it; knowing that only 4 out of 14 Spotlights illuminate the Chancel, we ordered replacements for after the holidays to bring light into the darkness on the Chancel. BUT, rather than disturb what had been regular practices, I have tried to keep the peace by fitting myself into your mold. So it was that someone came to me before Advent to ask Which emphases do you want to happen which Sundays? All of us agree that the 1st is Hope and the 3rd Candle is Pink,... but is it Hope, Love, Joy, Peace; or Hope, Peace, Love, Joy; or Hope, Peace, Joy, Love or Hope, Love, Peace Joy? Which on the surface does not matter, so long as we begin with Hope and on Christmas Eve we celebrate Christ's light pierces the darkness with Hope, Love, Joy and Peace! But, does it affect what we mean by Peace, if we are already celebrating the comforts of JOY? Are we emphasizing systemic differences within our culture, if part of our world is celebrating Joy while others believe there is still no Peace? Is OUR Desire to Make Peace different from GOD's Peace?

Do you recall where you were / what you were doing during the chaos of President Kennedy assassinated? Can you recall where you were / what you were doing when planes hit the World Trade Center and the Pentagon? We recall days of Chaos upsetting our order, but do we also celebrate when Peace comes? VE and VJ Day were before my time. But for the last 70 years there have been no celebrations of Peace. Even on the Day After the Cuban Missile Crisis when the Russian ships turned away, there was only an enormous SIGH of relief that superpowers averted Nuclear War, but were there celebrations of Peace? The Armistice of Conflict between North and South Korea, and the Armistice between North and South Viet Nam each made headlines and stopped fighting, currently our Troops are being withdrawn who were sent to the Mid-East following 9/11. HOWEVER is PEACE only the absence of our Armed Conflict or is there more that we await and expect in God's Peace?

When we say "Rest in Peace" are we claiming that all thought, consciousness and feeling is over? Do we believe in tranquility and beauty in resurrection after death, or is Peace as described in Thornton Wilder's "OUR TOWN" only a Cemetery of absence and nothingness? I believe in a Resurrection to life, of a more glorious HEAVEN beyond this life! What that is, I do not know, but I do believe and affirm: Christ's coming was/is to conquer death that not even death could isolate/ deny us from the love of God.

Our Old Testament lesson from 2nd Samuel is recalled as God's Promise of a LINEAGE, and a coming Messiah who would be The Son of David, but pay attention to how this begins. "After the King was settled in his palace and the Lord had given him rest from all his enemies around him."

There was already a cessation of war and of conflict with the Canaanites and Philistine, which had waged since Moses. AND YET David had not yet brought the two halves of his country together, or built the Temple at Jerusalem, apart from the PEACE of Conflict... David was NOT CONTENT, David desired more.

The Jewish meaning of "SHALOM" means PEACE, but also JUSTICE, BALANCE ORDER, that there is RESOLUTION all parties, not only can, but do accept. More than King David's DESIRE here to do something magnificent FOR God, God instead chose to create in David something more magnificent for humanity! As much as we try to control, to plan and create "Christmas PERFECTION" the point of this passage is that Christ's Coming is not up to us!

What concerns me, what concern us all when we like David try to think as if we were God, is that in Genesis CAIN tried to determine what God would have as an Offering, just as David did here, AND both were challenged by God to remember God is God and we are Human Creatures, GOD is the Initiator the Creator, but both CAIN & DAVID ignored God, ultimately committing murder and creating ruin.

Richard Lischer is a professor of Theology at Duke Divinity School, published in this week's CHRISTIAN CENTURY magazine in our Library, who eloquently describes: "BEFORE ADVENT is even a word, Advent is A SIGH, A VOICE crying in the wilderness. A MOOD. Never more felt than in these troubled months. Advent marks both the fatigue, exhaustion and hope of God's people, when the meaning of our lives is expressed in a weary exhale of ordinary breath(SIGH); followed by a sharp intake of something greater!

What Divine Irony, that we are struggling against a disease that robs creatures of our breath, when the Breath of GOD we know to be The Holy Spirit! Advent is the Gateway to the Incarnation, when GOD RETHOUGHT what it means to be God, and God decided to make a full and unreserved OFFERING in the human world. Advent pays close attention to this world into which Jesus came and takes it seriously.

Advent is the season of "waiting" and the Hebrew word for "WAITING" is also the word for "HOPE". There are dozens of ways of WAITING, but only one way to HOPE. We can wait patiently or impatiently, fearfully or with anticipation, we can wait as realists or as impossible dreamers. We may not always recognize God, but in every act of justice and reconciliation God is with us." And that is our role and function, we are to serve as witnesses recognizing God-with-us in common acts of reconciliation!

Years ago, I dealt with a significant conflict in a congregation, where there was no good outcome, no possible compromise, no way for either group to succeed let alone win. To fight for either side meant to tear the church apart. Instead of fighting, instead of escalating the conflict, I tried to de-escalate by embracing PEACE. The difficulty is when you accept the PEACE of not being willing to Fight back, even if the other party accelerates the problem, you cannot then fight back. You either fully accept an unreserved Peace or you do not; there is no middle ground, no third way.

The Gospel of John is distinct from all the other Gospels of Good News. The Gospel of John begins in the land of time before time. The text begins at the precise moment when the cosmic

encounters the mystical, the Incarnational and the concrete. The first human mentioned in this Gospel is named John. While the others identify him as The Baptizer or John the Baptist, here his primary identity as the first human-named is “Sent by God to bear witness to the Word and point to the Light”. John’s function, just as our own, is to serve as Witness. In the Gospel of John, “to Witness” is a Verb that occurs 33 times in this Gospel, whereas in the other three Gospels together occurs only twice. The purpose of Witnessing is not to propose alternate possibilities, not to argue or contradict, or even to challenge. The purpose of witnessing is to say what we have heard and seen and to attest to the Truth of another’s testimony, validating the Other.

On this 4th Week of Advent, the Gospel is not about a young couple on a holy journey to Bethlehem. Readers will see no shepherds, and hear no cantatas in the field. There are no Inn Keepers, and no Magi. Instead, John 1 is an Advent text reminding us that the first witnesses did not come to be decorated or acclaimed, or to get everyone ready for Christmas, but simply to prepare the way for others. This witness spoke out that the darkest forces of the world are not as intimidating as they appear, and that no fear or power has ever been as powerful as the Word of God made flesh living among us full of grace and truth.

In preparing our new Elders and Deacons for Installation, one asked: SO Craig what do you want us to do? The fact of the matter is that we are primed for an exciting future! This last year, we got to know one another very quickly, in an international crisis. With this foundation of faith and trust, I have no plans or Desires for what GOD SHOULD DO, or what I want, instead we are called to be WITNESSSS of WHAT GOD IS DOING in our midst. In this Advent, we too are called to consider what it means to make a full and unreserved investment in one another, through our church, in this community and the world.