

Squamish United Church
Rev. Karen Millard
Advent III

December 14, 2014

Scripture Readings:

Isaiah 61:1-4, 10-11

John 1:6-8; 19-28

Expectant Joy

Once again we hear the prophets call out the truth. When we recognize God with us we will be clothed with Joy and our whole being will exult God. John lets us know that Jesus is so full of life and love we will be transformed by the spirit through his very life and presence.

As we continue in this Advent theme I wanted to share with you a reading I found from Micol Contrell. I have adapted it for today.

Changed by the Ancient Story

“Advent centres us on Christ’s coming, the coming of Christ past, present and future. It’s the time to centre ourselves on the advent of God, the coming of God into this world.

What does it sound like to you if you are told that YOU, you are the site of incarnation, you are the place where the transforming love of Christ will come today and tomorrow.

What does it sound like to you if you are told the YOU, you are Mary impregnated by the HOLY, a key place in the dominion of God in the full reign of holiness being nurtured and nourished into this world?

What does it sound like to hear that YOU, you are the place where Christ’s deep and wide love will be birthed, from whom God’s hope, peace, joy and love will emerge, and where people will be invited to encounter the Holy?

What does it sound like?

Is there fear, hesitation, uncertainty?

Do you want to write it off and say “Not me, I’m too young old, weak, fearful; distracted, stubborn, uncertain?”

Do you want to write it off and say “Not me, I don’t know enough, love enough, have enough, I am not holy enough?”

If you hear your name being called out and the words “Blessed are you, you will bear the Messiah,” are there any preconceived notions about God and how God works that you need to let go of?

Do you need to let go of any ideas you have about yourself?

What limitations from encountering others as Mary’s, sites of incarnation, do you need to pass beyond so you can see God being birthed into this world in your neighbourhood?

What does it sound like to us if we are told we are Marys? (*We are John’s, We are Isaiah’s?*)

From the stillness and the questions we pray: God, who breaks through the limits of mind and body, time and space, friars and uncertainties, in the pilgrimage of Advent and beyond help us to empty ourselves of all that holds us back from being a *Prophet* in our time from being the *one who points to Christ* again and again in our touch, in our words, in our thoughts, in our life, in community and communion. Help us to let go and fall into you and in that embrace give birth to your limitless possibilities and transforming love. In this Advent time help us to not only hear and speak the ancient story of Christ's birth but to enter into it and be forever changed. This we pray with the "yes" of *Christ* Amen May it be so."¹

Today's scriptures share with us a John who points the way to the light. As we wait in the season of Advent our main task is to point the way and give witness to Jesus as we model discipleship. Jesus shares with us great dreams, aspirations as expectations for the one who will follow. Jesus will fill us with such hope and light that we will be transformed. Just like the call we were given in the reading, perhaps today we by the prophets are called to testify and point to the light. To be the prophets of the Advent story. Let people know that God is with us and if we see and recognize that light our lives and world will experience more hope, peace, joy, and love.

Another author Mary Luti wrote "In Advent we walk on tiptoe, a finger to our lips. A mystery is unfolding in a womb. Contemplation is in order now. Let us be still. Yet a quiet Advent is at odds with its typical scriptures. They suggest a ruckus, not a retreat. Stars, full moons collide, nations groan. God rips open the heavens. Torrents of justice hit parched earth with ear-splitting force. Mountains quake, fire erupts, seas boils. It's a season for insomniacs - wake up, stay awake, watch out, heads up, on you feet! The Baptist cries out, heralds announce on mountaintops... God clears the threshing floor, sleeves rolled up. Sweaty blacksmiths beat swords into plowshares. Heavy equipment is lined up to bulldoze, level, straighten, build (*the path straight for the way of the Lord*)

If we ever imagined that our healing would be a gentle, quiet thing, the Advent scriptures correct us. It's noisy heavy-lifting. So if we grow quiet in Advent - if we use our indoor voices and walk on tiptoe - let it be so that all the world might better hear this divine rumpus that saves us, the crashing and banging God's ancient promises make as one by one they all come true."²

In today's scripture John says to the people, "Prepare!" Not "I am preparing," but "You prepare." Prepare the way of the Lord. Prepare the world: Lift up, bring down, straighten, smooth. Level the field on which my people stand, John might say, so that all of my people can bask in the glory of God.

¹ Contrell, Micol, Allenford-Park Head P.C. Allenford Ont. Gathering.

² Luti, Mary Noisy Advent "Tear Open the Heavens" pg. 16

So what does this have to do with Joy? How can we live like the prophet calls us to adorned in righteousness, and joy, like a bridegroom? One of our other lectionary scriptures called us to be rejoice always, without ceasing. This is not about a fake smile or a mask in the face of the realities of the world. We are to rejoice always because we always know we are not alone and we live in the promises of a God who will transform our world.

Advent is about opening our eyes even in the midst of the broken world that we might see signs of redemption, light, righteousness all around us. A minister friend of mine shared with me this week that in his congregation they now begin every service by sharing “God moments” together. People are given opportunity to let the rest of the community know weekly where they have seen God in the midst. Imagine how much easier it has become for those folks to see God, to point the way to the light. They practice it regularly, and it becomes easier and easier.

“When Paul says "Rejoice always," he is not saying "Cheer up!" or "Get happy!" He is talking about our keeping ourselves centred in the deep joy that knows, regardless of the darkness of the hour, we are children of light rather than darkness, not because we are enlightened, but because we belong to the light. The saints persevere, not because of our steadfastness, but because of God's--God is faithful and does not leave himself without witnesses. We are to rejoice in this always, without ceasing, and in all circumstances...

We are to pray without ceasing. This does not mean a life spent on one's knees in an oratory or cave. On the other hand, time on our knees, whether literally or figuratively, must be a part of the daily rhythm of our lives if we are to remain faithful. For in such prayer, you and I are drawn into the intimacy of God's presence and there nurtured by God's presence and power. One of my favourite definitions for prayer is "conscious contact with God."³

“Such conscious contact with God in the midst of our daily activity actually brings God's power and holiness to bear on our lives and all those things that engage them. Brother Lawrence called it "practicing the presence of God." For when our lives are in such constant dialogue with God, all that we see, encounter, contemplate and do is held before God, while we are, in turn, buttressed with a divine self-giving that takes place within us.”⁴

And so today we are called to point the way to the light. Rejoice in that light and expect your life to be altered. Where in your life and world can you point to the presence of God in the midst? Where can you look forward and testify to the light? Where are you being called to shout out from the mountaintop “Behold, Behold” God is here? Bear that light and you too will birth Christ’s hope, peace, joy and love in this world.

May we so live.

³ Anderson, Fred “God’s Will For You” http://day1.org/1123-gods_will_for_you

⁴ IBID

Amen