

Commentary on the Gospel for Fri, Dec 2nd 2016

We enter Advent hopeful and anticipatory! Like children waiting for Christmas? Or is there something else much more meaningful that we can be doing during Advent? For how much more can we hope? Isaiah tells us that all good things are possible! There is a gift here for everyone in this passage. Those of us who are concerned about the environment may read that the earth will be restored. Those of us in need of physical healing might read that we will be healed. If we are in confusion or sadness, we will anticipate being lifted out of gloom and darkness. The lowly and poor hear hope that those who tyrannize them or who are too lofty to care about them will disappear from their lives. And what a relief to hear that evil will be cut off and the just will be vindicated!

In this passage Isaiah conveys a powerful message that the Lord God wants us to know that the Lord is in our midst! There will be no mistaking that we will see the work of his hands. The people of God will be so impressed they will reverence the God of Israel and keep his name holy. The weak and wayward in spirit will acquire understanding and those who find fault will get redirected. Wow! That about includes everything on my Christmas list!

So what is our response to this amazing news! Do we see Advent as the time to sit back and wait for all these good things to happen to and for us? Like children wait for Santa Claus? No, it can be more than that! The Psalm for today says we can ask for even more than Isaiah says is coming. We can ask for entry into the house of the Lord where we may gaze on the loveliness of the Lord and contemplate the beauty of his temple all the days of our lives. There we shall see the bounty of the Lord in the land of the living. But there is a catch. The Psalmist says we have to wait.....it seems that one of the tensions with our faith is centered in all that God promises to us is already, but not yet. There is a lot of waiting going on.....but it is a special kind of waiting, I think.

During Advent, this waiting is something like preparing for Christmas. It is an active waiting in which we can reflect on what is it that we really need and want beyond that Christmas list. Children prepare for Christmas by hoping and anticipating, but adults engage in the season by working to make it happen. In many ways that is the difference between adults and children in terms of our faith as well. Children aren't good at waiting. Becoming an adult means we learn to wait.....while actively engaging in life. I like to practice Christmas the way I practice Advent, which is to anticipate and celebrate all of the events that lead up to it more than just the events on Christmas Eve or Christmas Day. I like the busyness of the holiday season. Christmas is the coming together of families and friends, the sharing of the blessings of hospitality and good food, and the thoughtfulness of considering how we might provide good cheer and good will through gift giving to those we love and those in need. In those ways, many of us celebrate Christmas all year long. It keeps us busy!

So then, what is so special about Advent? I think it is a special time of lifting up our hope to a higher level of consciousness in our faith. It is a time to wait for the fullness of the Lord with renewed courage. It is a time to experience more deeply the light and salvation of the Lord in our lives. That's why we light all those candles! And Advent is a time to really grapple with the darkness of our fears and our unbelief. It is a time to be stouthearted, for what have we to fear? Jesus tells us in Matthew that he can do anything for us according to our faith....if we just believe. Like children who believe in Santa Claus? No, like the adult people of God who will acquire even more understanding of the bounty of the Lord in the land of the living that is here, already. It is the belief in the hope that the

Lord can do anything. No matter what our circumstances, all things are yet possible. But to see and understand that, we must have courage in our refuge, in our light, and in our salvation. So I pray with all of you, that Advent will be for each of us a time of lifting up our hope to a higher level. I pray that Advent is for each of us a time of courageous hope and anticipation for a better world in which we will share all the gifts we have been given of faith, love, peace, joy, mercy, acceptance, hospitality, self-less giving, and a genuine sense of brotherhood with all of humanity. If we believe in Jesus, we can do this with him, for him and in him.

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