

Sunday 27th November 2022 1st in Advent

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God is love, let us adore God by sharing God's love.

God is ever present, around us and within us, we worship together in God.

Advent is a time of waiting:

we wait for God, and

God waits for us.

Advent is a time of journey:

we journey towards God, and

God surrounds us with love.

Advent is a time of being:

we find ourselves in God, and

God reveals himself to the world.

Advent Candle

You are with us, Emmanuel,
our hearts beat within your presence,
until, in the fullness of our humanity, our hearts beat as one.

Here in this place we wait,
an advent people,
visual signs all around,
eternity effervescing in each moment, each heartbeat, and each star.

Come we cry, yet you are here.
Open our eyes we cry, yet we fail to see.
Messengers come and messengers go and still we wait,
engaged with the world we miss the creator. *(Heather Whyte 2022)*

Stop and think - How have you experienced hope this week?
Light the candle and say,
'We light this candle for the hope we feel because of Jesus' message,
and as a prayer for those people who feel they have no hope.'
Eternal God may your hope fill the world.

Readings Deuteronomy 30:11-19
Matthew 24:36-44

Reflection

I wonder what Advent means in your family? I imagine there may be an Advent Calendar, with chocolate or even gin, there is one in our house with a different mini jar of jam for each day. However, apart from that our Advent is often restricted to church and the lighting of the candles each Sunday which is a shame. Advent is about waiting but it is not about a passive waiting, rather it should be a time of contemplative waiting which can take many forms.

In our reading from Deuteronomy Moses is urging the Israelites to stop and reflect as they prepare to cross into the promised land. He reminds them that he has taught them God's laws, so they know what they should do but they have a choice. They can obey God's laws and have the expectation that life will be fruitful and fulfilling, or they can choose to ignore God's laws and expect disaster. The laws are there to ensure good relationships and peaceful community life. It is a choice each of us faces every day but often we are not even aware of the significance of choice. Theologian, Paula Gooder, talks of Advent as being rooted in biblical expectation as we wait for something that has already happened, the birth of Jesus, and at the same time look forward to a future event, the day of judgement. The former is easy but the latter is often challenging because our understanding of God has developed and changed. Indeed, if the end of time is the coming of God's Kingdom as many believe then Jesus himself put a spanner in the works by saying the kingdom was already present, if only partially. For me, there is clear evidence that the world as we know it is threatened and yet I do not believe that this equates to the biblical Armageddon which is often interpreted

through some biblical passages. God did not create, sit back and say that is good but I'll take it away sometime. Humanity, has interpreted the effects of choice as acts of God, and some strands of Christianity have them chosen to interpret a previous understanding with a literal day of judgement on non-Christians. However Advent does present a tension and so perhaps we choose to concentrate on the easy bit.

In our reading from Matthew we have an example of the early understanding and we also have Jesus saying he has no idea when the end time will come, and then he uses the conversation to encourage a readiness through choosing to obey the law. However, the way of Jesus goes far deeper than a simple choice, it encourages an active participation in the transformation of the world to bring the kingdom closer. Advent is an opportunity to reset our lives and refocus our view. It is a moment to stop and celebrate God with us.

Richard Rohr suggests we become more aware, more alive and more accepting, more attentive and more alert. We use the time to prepare ourselves to celebrate by becoming more fully conscious of God with us in the everyday and actively looking beyond our comfort zone to engage with those who are on the edge. Through active waiting we begin to explore living without closure and resolution and become content amidst uncertainty. We have a model, Jesus, who was always reaching out to those on the edge and encouraging an interdependence which is all about loving one another, and valuing the gifts and talents of everyone. Interdependence means an end to dependence but also an end to independence – no one is an island what we do affects other people and we can choose to make that effect positive or negative.

So where do we begin this advent? Maybe create your own advent calendar by setting a challenge for each day that becomes a constant reminder about the meaning of advent. It could be as simple as deliberately looking for the presence of God around you each day and recording it in words or a picture – photograph or sketch. It could be choosing to read something each day – an advent book such as Richard Rohr's – Preparing for Christmas, Paula Gooder's The meaning in the waiting, or Margaret Silf's Lighted Windows, you could read a poem each day from Janet Morley's Haphazard by Starlight, or perhaps you would prefer a story such as Jostein Gaarder's The Christmas Mystery or Steven Croft's The Advent Calendar both of which take you on a journey of magical discovery.

Advent is a time of intentional journeying towards the revelation of knowing, it is a growing awareness of the moment, appreciation of the present, and when we do advent fully it makes the expected event more than the sum of the parts, a true celebration of relationship and oneness. Perhaps doing advent heighten our awareness of Christmas itself.

I have recently discovered the books of James Norbury which explore Buddhist principles through two characters Big Panda and Tiny Dragon who journey together. They are full of insightful observations which invite us to reflect on our own life. In the second book, The Journey, The pair reflect on the weeds in a garden recognising that in some ways the mind is a little like a garden, it too needs care attention and effort. They decide they must embark on a journey which involves the realisation that you cannot pack everything for a journey. On the eve of crossing the great river the pair settle down and Tiny Dragon suggests a cup of tea. This means collecting sticks for the fire which he does but then reflects that he does not enjoy collecting sticks as he used to. Big Panda suggests that when Tiny Dragon was young collecting sticks would have taken all attention and when we are focussed like that our mind tends not to wander and we sense an inner peace. Tiny Dragon thinks, and then admits that as he had been gathering sticks for the fire he had been thinking about the journey and not really thinking about the sticks he was gathering.

Perhaps we are a bit like Tiny Dragon, we are so busy preparing for Christmas that we have lost the art of celebrating Christmas, by using advent to reset ourselves we may begin to celebrate Christmas differently.