

Morning Meditation – Advent Week One – Hope

I invite you to light one single candle, a candle of Hope, as you read this meditation.

The days leading us to Christmas are not only about parties, Christmas cards, cookies, shopping, hustle and bustle; this is a sacred season for us to ground ourselves in the mystery and marvel of God coming to us in human flesh. The theological word here is incarnation, which I believe is one of the most important words for faith. God’s willingness, vulnerability, eagerness, prayerfulness, hope-filled-ness, unconditional love and unceasing grace enters this fragile/foible-filled vessel called, “human life”.

Just in case that doesn’t cause us to scratch and shake our heads (after all gods are supposed to be powerful and throw lightening bolts, right? Not come upon earth in a form where you are susceptible to diseases in the body and dis-eases of the heart. Not come upon earth where you are crucified – but I am getting ahead of myself here in the story). God decided that God would come to earth in the form of a vulnerable infant.

And oh, by the way, God decides the God-bearer would be an unwed woman, Mary.

And oh, by the way, God’s grand entry is in a barn. I’ve been in barns, and not a Martha Stewart shabby-chic kind of barn. One with animals who smell and do animal-kinds-of things.

And oh, by the way, the only ones who will witness and testify to this marvelous miracle are shepherds who are seen by society not on the lowest rung of the economic ladder – they weren’t even allowed near the ladder in the first place!

What kind of story is this?

This is why we can return to this sacred story year-after-year and discover/uncover something new. Each and every time we encounter this marvelous, mysterious story, we are in a new place to encounter one of the details in a life-giving and life-changing ways.

This Advent we are centering around the question: what are you waiting for?

Depending on where you place the emphasis, you might evoke a different response. If you put weight on the first word, what, you might start listing events you are waiting for – like say a vaccine that could enable us to have in-person worship again with singing! If you put the weight on the word, “you”, you might dive and dwell deeply in what your soul is longing for. If you place weight on the word, “waiting”, I find myself pausing, leaning in, and listening to the truth that the world we inhabit doesn’t instantly and immediately microwave/text/tweet to resolutions. Waiting is about time. Waiting isn’t only about getting somewhere or something done, it is about sensing God in the journey.

That is my prayer for Advent, we will wait together and discover anew that God is not only born in a barn...God is discovered in our hearts – even and especially – right now this year.

Prayer: O come, o come Emmanuel, may the doorway to my heart be open to you every day during this season of Advent. Amen.

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I invite you to light one single candle, a candle of Hope, as you read this meditation.

*O come, O come, Emmanuel, and ransom captive Israel
That mourns lonely exile here, until the child of God appear.
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel shall come to you, O Israel!*

Yesterday, I invited you to hold the question, “What are you waiting for?” To ask that question in different ways, with different weight on each word, and see what might be evoked and provoked for you. How did that go?

The season of Advent is about both waiting and preparing for Emmanuel.

A few things about that sentence. First, there is a tension built and baked into this season. We wait (which is usually passive) and prepare (which is usually about making lists, checking them twice, and being in charge/control.) We wait – for that which is beyond us. We prepare – doing what we can, where we can. Do you hear that tension? There is a both/and of this holy time of year. Do you hear how we usually focus on the preparing part with the parties and the festivities and the hustle/bustle; how this year we can attend to the Advent truth of waiting. Waiting for all sorts of events and experiences and encounters which have been delayed or deferred or denied or dismissed entirely. Waiting. Second, we are waiting for Emmanuel – a name that means – “God is with us and God is for us.” Hold that for a moment.

As we wait, we can pray. I believe this Advent hymn, “O Come, o come Emmanuel” is a beautiful prayer this year. I quoted the first verse above. The second line, “That mourns in lonely exile here,” might define and distinguish the last nine months of our lives. We grieve not being together. We lament the pain that sits uneasy in our souls. We mourn the passing of people we love to this virus and the brokenness that polarization has caused in our country and the ways we discriminate against our brothers and sisters made in God’s holy image.

Advent isn’t only “Rejoice, rejoice”. Advent is a time, in the waiting, to process the pains, strains, stress, and God-forsakenness we might feel. Pastors don’t often get to talk about this because it seems too depressing right before Christmas. But I believe that only when we are honest about our wounds and wants can rejoicing – heartfelt and honest rejoicing – come in the morning. Our, that it is in mourning that joy comes in the morning. In our waiting, watching,

wondering, and wandering, can we name and notice the places where we struggle right now? Prayerfully ask, invite, God to enter that space/place with Emmanuel – God’s holy presence.

Prayer: May the words of this meditation, O God, be embraced, embodied, and experienced in my life today. Amen.

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I invite you to light one single candle, a candle of Hope, as you read this meditation.

*O come, Thou Wisdom from on high, And order all things, far and nigh;
To us the path of knowledge show, And cause us in her ways to go.
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel shall come to you, O Israel!*

We are waiting.

We are processing that which is uneasy and uncomfortable within us.

We are listening, attuned to the holy hovering and humming around us.

We need wisdom and we need to be prompted in her way to go. Did you catch that pronoun? I love that this hymn celebrates the truth in the Hebrew Scriptures how Wisdom is personified as a woman. In the book of Proverbs, wisdom or Sophia, sings at the street corners for us to listen. In the book of Proverbs, wisdom or Sophia, prepares a nourishing meal and invites us to feast. In the book of Proverbs, wisdom or Sophia, is the sacred presence of God in our midst.

I know I need wisdom right now. I know I need to hear God’s soprano/alto voice singing to my soul. I know I hunger and thirst for God’s sacred meal to feed me beyond the leftover turkey (or leftover wisdom of this world that is rewarmed every day in the microwave of daily news).

I am wondering, who is a woman in your life who shared wisdom? A woman whose name might not have been, “Sophia,” but was Sophia to you?

I think of my next-door neighbor, Mary, who would make me cookies and listen to me.

I think of my pastors, Pat and Sue and Linda, who mentored me.

I think of women in our church whose compassion and care help me in ways beyond words.

Now, I want you to call a woman you are thinking about. Or, if like my next-door neighbor, Mary, from my childhood that isn’t possible, write a letter or say the words out loud to the universe trusting that wherever this woman is...she will hear you.

May this prayer practice be your prayer today. Amen!

Morning Meditation – Advent Week One - Hope

I invite you to light one single candle, a candle of Hope, as you read this meditation.

*O come, O Day-spring, come and cheer our spirits by your advent here;
Love stir within the womb of night, and death's own shadows put to flight.
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel shall come to you, O Israel!*

We wait. We watch. We wonder and wander. We prepare by honoring women in our lives who have shaped us with wisdom and love. Just as God enters the world through Mary, the God-bearer, so God continues to enter the world through women in our lives.

In this third verse of the poem/prayer/Advent hymn, “O come, O come Emmanuel,” I love the line about “love stirring in the womb of night”. Valarie Kaur talks about the darkness of life sometimes being a tomb and sometimes being a womb. That in the struggles and stress of life sometimes we find ourselves there because something is dying or ending. Sometimes in the chapters of the narrative/story called, “Your life” there are endings. It could be literal ones where a person you love dies. It could also be that you have reached the end of a job or a volunteer opportunity. Sometimes we stay far-too long at something that has ended because it is comfortable, and our brain has a bias of complacency. Our brain knows how hard it is to change, so it gives us all these amazing reasons why we should not bother. Sometimes rather than a celebration of a graduation, we stay too long in a place or space that has taught us all that place or space can. Like the man in Mark’s gospel who lives among the tombs, we know what it is like to have places and spaces in our life that we have outgrown, but we feel bound to, nevertheless.

But the tomb, as Kaur tells us, can be a womb – a place of rebirth and new life. The man in Mark’s gospel encounters Jesus and his life is forever changed. But birth is painful and messy. Birth will cause all sorts of disruptions to the narrative of life.

While we wait, what tombs popped into your mind in the words above? Are there places or spaces that you feel like you need to not carry into 2021?

While we wait, what wombs are gestating and growing within you? Are there places and spaces that you feel like you want to give life too in 2021?

May God’s wisdom move in your heart this day with these questions.

Prayer: To us, O God, your path of wisdom show this day and every day this Advent season. And cause us in her way to go. Amen.

Morning Meditation – Advent Week One - Hope

I invite you to light one single candle, a candle of Hope, as you read this meditation.

*O come, Desire of Nations bind all peoples in one heart and mind;
Make envy, strife and quarrels cease; fill the whole world with heaven's peace.
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel shall come to you, O Israel!*

We wrap up and wind down this first week of Advent. I find the above words so powerful amid the pandemic and polarization of this world we inhabit. God, please help me set aside envy, the way I compare and contrast my life to others. Help me set aside the strife I feel internally and ways I participate in spreading strife externally. God evoke and provoke peace within me so that I overflow peace to others.

Each and every day this week I invited you to one single candle, "Hope". Now, I want you to reflect on hopes in your heart. First, start with writing that word, "Hope" in the center of a piece of paper. Then, all around it, write words that stir within you. I hope for a vaccine; good health for my family/friends; for our church to be able to gather and sing together; that in some way I would share love with those who are grieving; kids to be surrounded with love; those leading our church to be grounded and guided by wisdom; our leaders to stop political point scoring and start governing; that these words I write to you might somehow and in some way make a difference.

Now, step back and breathe. Pause. Wait. Watch. Wonder.

After a minute, were there any other words that stirred within you?

Now, step back and breathe. Pause. Wait. Watch. Wonder.

Pick up another color pen or pencil and prayerfully ponder what God's hopes for you are? If God wrote a prayer for you, what words might God select and write upon your heart and life today?

May what is evoked and provoked by these questions be your prayer, and may your words be embodied and embraced by you this day. Amen.