

A Sermon - The People's Advent Words

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[This sermon is a reflection on the People's words for Advent. It only loosely addresses the usual Eucharistic Lectionary readings used for this 3rd Sunday of Advent. It was written to be spoken, and because of the snow has lost something as a written text to be read.]

*"One deep calls to another in the noise of your cataracts; *
all your rapids and floods have gone over me...." Ps 42:9*

Introduction:

In October, I came to you with an invitation that arose from the planning for the Holiday Market. The initial idea had to do with creating something to be sold at the Market.

From a dialogue I had with Diane Watson we were called as a community to create our own Advent calendar from a collection of reflections, prayers, poems about and memories of Advent written by the people at St. Augustine's. The contributors include: Rob Anderson, Wayne Bacus, Teresa Di Biase, Diane Watson, Brian and Rebecca Reid, Kathryn Rickert, Jan Skubi, Bill Skubi, Herbert Spier, and Susan Sandri.

It was a very rewarding experience to receive the "People's Advent Words", and then, I hope with not *too much* editing, to weave them together into an Advent Calendar that many of us have been using throughout Advent.

The invitation to contribute said:

"Advent, and the other liturgical seasons have the capacity to work something like alternative realities. Advent is an Episcopal/ Christian practice that superimposes a sacred calendar / season and meanings on top of or within secular ones, and offers HOPE with another view of the past, present and the future.

As a community, we have an opportunity to put together an Advent Calendar for ourselves and for those around us, one that will help us to sort through and live faithfully with the overwhelming issues and events within in and around us at this time."

Some people read the calendar at breakfast and others at dinner, etc. It was such a powerful experience for Gary and I to read the poem written for Nov. 29th just before dinner in our motor home at Salt Creek Recreation Area, as part of our table blessing, in the dark of the Straits of Juan de Fuca on the Olympic Peninsula. What a precious gift, one not available in any store...this beautiful poem of faith and hope in the darkness.

The process that brought about the Advent calendar,
and the ones by which Scripture has come together
and the ones by which we live in and nurture this Body of Christ
and that by which we struggle through the challenges of being a democracy

are all that of on-going dialogue:

One event, holy or human calls forth an array of responses
--"rescued responses to God's presence among us --

Our Christian faith is made out of dialogues...

Part I: Our Christian faith is made out of dialogues...

God calls out to us...
We call out to God, and to each other...
We say... "The Lord be with you...."
and then reply "And, also with you."

We sing, "O come, O come, Emmanuel....." and wait.

A deacon or priest proclaims "The Holy Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ
according to _____ .
And we respond: "Glory to you, Lord Christ."

We call out, await a response, and then hope to hear yet more from God.
As, does God from us!

The Good News is proclaimed to us through the sermon
and we respond with the Creed,
...and how we go about living out what has been offered to us.

Our Advent Calendar is another example of these important dialogues.

God speaks to us through events, people, sacred words, places, the Spirit within, and actions, memories, experience. *Sometimes deeper than words...*

God spoke and continues to engage us in this Holy Dialogue through Creation and through;

the life-restoring unfolding of Covenant relationships,
we are God's People and God is our God,

the Exodus, and restoration after Exile;
setting us free from the bonds of injustice and oppression

the Spirit empowered Body of Christ,

and most powerfully through the Incarnation of Jesus...
God coming to dwell among us.

An important thing about the kind of dialogue that serves to form and sustain our faith is the need for more than one speaker and more than one listener. And then, some balance between the speaking and listening is also necessary. One person alone does not hold a dialogue with one's self. (Yes, it is a dialogue when we talk to ourselves, but a different kind. It's not communal.)

After the 2nd Sunday of Advent, I realized that we have this opportunity to use our experience with the calendar to think about how these exchanges and dialogues are important to our life as a Christian community. It is never enough to proclaim the Good News; that proclamation calls for responses of various kinds. And we do, we respond in many different ways.

So, what does it mean to respond to a call? (or not to do so?)

In some traditions, the response is out loud, and public and very clear. "Amen!"
"Yes, Lord!" or No!

For us, who could also say "Amen." and "Yes, Lord"...it is more likely that our response comes in the form of respectful, strong yet, meaningful silence, and a prayer or creed that we say together.

Response does not mean only to accept or reject. NO, response often means to talk back to. Such dialogues are powerful because of the relational strings attached to calls and responses. When a dialogue is authentic, there are strong implications of recognition, acknowledgement, and honoring of each other. (Or, sometimes, the failure to recognize, acknowledge, or honor the other.) And when those recognitions, acknowledgments and honoring are missing, it lets us know that those relationships are not what they could be.

I hope that you will respond to the people who helped to make this Calendar. Not so much because you "like" their contributions, but more because you appreciate their willingness to try to share something of their faith with you, to offer your hope in this Advent.

The words of all of us -- Our memories, prayers, hopes, actions-- matter to the faith of this community. They feed our faith in this place. It is not only the words or actions of the "professional Episcopalians" that feed our faith. We feed each other's faith with our words, memories, generosity, actions, poems, reflections, experience, and prayers.

We "talk (sing, pray, think, wonder...) to God"... *often without using words*...and we do expect some kind of response, welcome, nod, some indication that there is "Somebody" there, Listening.

The Psalter from which we pray each week, is a strong example of such dialogues. The Psalms overflow with such speech. The Psalms are spoken, read or sung *all* in a stance of hopeful, waiting expectation... waiting for an answer, for God's reply, God's action.

"Restore us, O Lord God of hosts; show the light of your countenance, [call]
and we shall be saved." Ps. 80: 18 [response]

This "dialogical" aspect of faith is what we have practiced in the making, and use of our parish Advent Calendar. And such "dialogical" action is a lot more than what may look merely like a cute craft project.

It is how God is with us and how we are with each other....
we call, and listen,
respond and then listen...

Part II: (Our Advent Dialogue)

The poems, prayers and reflections sent in were divided among the following categories: memories of Advent past, reflections on specific readings for Advent, insights into the spirituality and spiritual practices pertaining to this season, specific prayers for ourselves and others, and finally Advent poetry.

Below is an elaboration of each of the categories:

Memories of Advent past (and days leading up to Christmas)
and the application for now... to bring hope and vision to today, and *this* Advent

Reflections on the readings used during Advent –

Hope as the very core of our Christian faith and experience
Transformation – fruit production *for others*
Translation of the Gospel for today's context...re healing, and restoration of relationships, human and divine, in this time and place.

Insight into some of the Spirituality / spiritual practices of Advent

Waiting with Mary
a "time change"... transformation in how we live our days, use our time
re-entering that intense, life giving place of hopeful expectation and waiting

Prayers for ourselves and others – we ask for God's Presence and help, healing,
and restoration of relationships both, human and divine

Poems about Advent – hope in darkness, in what feels hopeless

3.) The People's Advent Words

Thus, dear people of St. Augustine's, here is a sampling of your words of hope and faith in the darkness. We prayerfully read and proclaim them here so that you will know that we are listening to each other;
so that you know that **even when, and particularly when we do not agree with each other**, we continue to acknowledge, and honor each other a sisters and brothers in the Body of Christ.

Since you are reading this on a screen and not hearing it read, I invite you to read aloud each of the following poems, prayer, and reflections. And then, please respond with silence or some word of gratitude, or reflection.

Memories of Advent

"I remember the Sundays leading up to Christmas - lighting the Advent candles & singing
"Oh Come Oh Come Emmanuel" -
a haunting melody of yearning for the coming of Christ;
calling to mind the wonderful celebration of the birth of Christ which is coming soon. "

Advent is the expectation and joy of the coming together of our family
from the various corners of the county;
renewal & reinforcing of our love, which bind us together;
My father reading to us from the Gospels of Jesus's birth

Wondering if it will snow,
I pull Advent memories out of the Christmas ornament box. ...
of my mother's Christmases on the farm;
my first bike & my ancestors
who brought me to that place.
Warmed, & strengthened, I am at peace.

Reflections on the readings used during Advent

... a cherry tree cut down because it produced very few cherries AND it blocked the sunlight to the tomatoes.
Are we like the cherry treenot yielding much?
Or are we like the tomatoes, yielding abundantly from whatever Light we perceive? --
a response to Matt. 3:10

"Abound in hope" Paul urges in Romans.
Advent bounds with hope and it begins with Mary,
"I am the handmaid of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word."
Yes, let it be to me this Advent.

Only God the Father knew that the Lord Jesus would be arriving on Earth, ...
not in some extravagant descent from the sky,
but borne of a woman selected by God

Insight into the Spirituality and spiritual practices of Advent

No one likes to wait. Yet, the season of Advent expects waiting.
Advent waiting is expectant waiting,
that excited feeling that something wonderful is about to happen.
Perhaps, Mary could be our expectant waiting partner?

Advent is like hitting "pause" when you're watching a frenetic movie.
If you allow yourself to enter this pause – if you accept Advent's invitation to wait,
reflect, and hope -- you won't want to resume that frenetic movie again.

Patience does not produce hope. Hope produces patience

Prayers for ourselves and others

May we be even more hopeful in Advent
than a child eagerly anticipating
what lies beneath the Christmas tree.

DEAR FATHER,
BESTOW ON US YOUR GRACE AND LOVE
THAT WE MIGHT SEE AS FROM ABOVE
AND LOOKING DOWN
WITH LOVING HEART FEEL COMPELLED
TO DO OUR PART TO MEET THE NEEDS
OF ALL OUR BROTHERS, ELEPHANTS TOO AND ALL THE OTHERS

Let us shed the dull and narrow
that divide and shut out
in order to welcome once again,
the Light of Peace, the Prince of Peace
for all Peoples and Nations
that we might live with hope in Jesus,
the Holy One,
who comes to make a home with us.

Poems about Advent

That clanging cold of winter dark clamps round.
A candle lit,
first one then two
and more announce
that dark is not forever. **Amen**

May this holy dialogue help to give us hope in the darkness,
and may we rejoice greatly at the coming of the Holy One, Jesus, the Christ. Amen.