

## An Advent Sermon 2017 - Kathryn Rickert

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This is the season of Advent, a time for hope, expectation, waiting and planning.

### **What are we waiting for?**

A small group gathered last Sunday after the 10:30 coffee hour to talk about Advent, about why we like it, why it means so much to us, what we remember about it from the past, what it offers us now, and what we wait for this year.

### **So, what are we waiting for?**

Yes, we are waiting for Christmas, for this feast of humble power, celebrating God with us and Peace on Earth for All. We are waiting for that, and so very much more.

It was a poignant conversation... there was rich silence, even a few tears. Each of us is waiting heavily... with intense longings, hopes, and expectations.

We began our time together by walking along the Advent Wall...and pondering what is there. Then each person explained what it is that he or she remembers and loves about Advent. There were many different responses. We are not all the same. Those differences were part of the beauty and power of the experience. It's not that we all wanted one thing.

Our longing is great! Some of us feel overwhelmed; lost in a cycle of discouragement, confusion, anger, and fear. All of us are living in times that sorely need Wisdom, Law, Living Branches and Light that shines through the Darkness. The details vary, but the deep needs are still sadly very much the same.

One of the purposes of the Wall is to make clear the implications of Advent for our lives today. As you will see from reading some of the poetry and songs on the wall, the issues and problems that we think of as "ours today" are hardly new. We share many of those same issues and problems with those who first sang those words in monastic communities of the 9<sup>th</sup> C. or those who first sang it as the Hymn, "O Come, O Come, Emmanuel" in the 18<sup>th</sup> C, or those... to whom John the Baptist cried out "proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins".

So, what does Advent have to do with us now? **What are we waiting for?**

Before we left last week, each of us answered that question.

mutual renewal inside and outside  
some COMMON understanding of Truth  
a restoration of civility  
a returning of Light  
Compassion  
a healing of brokenness of many kinds  
a respectful coming together of people across differences

## How does Advent help us wait in joy with hope and expectation?

This is a season of hopeful waiting, joyful anticipation, longing and preparation; preparation for a coming again, for another round of the Holy One, for more of God to be among us, for more of us to be with God (To be restored to God and each other) grafted onto that holy Branch that bears new fruit of freedom, justice, well-being, and peace for all of Creation, worthy of Christ.

As lovely as blue and purple are, as comforting as candle light and ancient hymns, Advent is not a season of escape. Advent is a sacred time and space for both comfort and challenge.

In this season we use some very strong language... about repentance and forgiveness of sins, freedom from Satan's tyranny, victory over death, closing the path to misery, ceasing of human divisions.

One place you can see something of how Advent works to both comfort and challenge by weaving together the past, present and the future, is on the panel for the O Antiphon O Key of David. Eileen Jackson has included a number of powerful images and texts about unlocking God's Reign of Peace.

Especially poignant is Langston Hughes' poem from **1936** "Let America Be America Again". In between his painful description of what was not going well in 1936, he inserts in brackets this phrase

("America never was America to me")

He who was Black and gay had the wisdom to see what America *could be*, but was not yet, (*then*) while at the same time speaking hopefully with faith and vision to describe an America of Peace and Justice for everyone. That kind of prophetic wisdom and vision is very much what Advent is about.

## How does Advent offer this wisdom and vision?

As Karl Rahner says it...

Ask not, doubt not.  
You have, my heart, already chosen the joy of Advent.  
As a force against your own uncertainty, bravely tell yourself.  
**"It is the Advent of the great God."**  
Say this with faith and love,  
and then both the past of your life,  
which has become holy,  
and your life's eternal boundless future  
will draw together in the now of this world.  
**For then into the heart comes the one who is Advent, ...**

**This kind of waiting**,,, with space in-between allows us to do the kind of reflection that simply does not happen in a hurry; we see so much more when we are not rushed and having to work with only small bits. When we reflect in a hurry we do come up with insights, but they are those from the top rather than those that come from deeper down within the depths of the season.

This past year has been very challenging in many ways. The intensity and complexity of that challenge had led me to think that over-all it was not a “good year”. And, yet,...when there was the time to look back at the many marvelous experiences that showed up on my FB this past week, I realized what I had not realized before. That while it was in some ways a difficult year, it was also a VERY good year. One of the best of my life. But I did not see that when I thought quickly from the surface. I needed to go deeper. I needed Advent.

**Advent offers us a distinct Frame** through which to look, think, feel, pray about, and live through the month of Dec. BOTH Comfort & Challenges. Both!

**Tools** – images, ideas, songs, colors... that serve both to comfort and to challenge.

A simple and inexpensive Christian liturgical Calendar” is one of the most powerful tools. This practice of living according to more than one calendar allows Christians and others whose lives are shaped by calendars of faith, to simultaneously hold multiple worldviews and self-understandings which provide strong strategies for dealing with the considerable challenges of post-modern life.

By using that “App” of the Liturgical Calendar we “in-load”, take into our hearts, heads, minds, bodies.... a distinct set of colors, images, words, icons, sounds.... which, working together, allow us to see something going here, **that we cannot find or buy at the mall!**

And we **can** do this while also still being part of that other secular calendar of “Global Christmas culture,” as long as it is the qualities of the Advent Season that contribute most to what goes on inside of us.

That “Advent App” brings us powerful forces to cut into and loosen some of that overwhelmingness, lostness, discouragement, confusion, anger...fears.” Powers to shake up... shed light on, loosen... re-frame, cause a 2<sup>nd</sup> 3<sup>rd</sup> look at the events of our lives.

**Comfort AND Challenge:** From the prophet Isaiah we hear Comfort, comfort, and from the JB we hear challenge.

There is a *gentle spaciousness* about Advent that does not rush us into either comfort or challenge. We are invited by these texts, images and stories to take our time as we prepare for the One who is Advent.

**The Comfort....**comes from even the smallest notion that in this extremely busy time of year, we can carve out some sacred space and time... (Even a bit) to take a step back from the beauty and pain of our lives to consider how all of that fits into the bigger picture of God's world.

This kind of waiting allows us (even for a little while) to enter into that sacred space and time of Advent...where in the calm and beauty we can listen and see what is going on. The comfort, **for me**, comes in the colors, the **songs**, the candles. Advent has a distinct flavor to it... we can hear that in the hymns:

Rejoice, rejoice Believer,  
Lo, he Comes with Clouds Ascending,  
O Come, O Come Emmanuel  
Hark! a thrilling voice is sounding  
Creator of the Stars of night  
Sleepers, Wake! A voice astounds us  
Prepare the way O Zion  
Come thou long expected Jesus  
Comfort, comfort ye my people  
The King shall come when morning dawns  
On Jordan's Bank the Baptist's cry  
People, Look East!

At this time of year when it is dark, and cold and we'd probably rather take a nap, we are challenged and comforted by these commands and powerful images. –

Lo, Hark, Wake, Come, Prepare, Comfort...in spite of the weather and events around us. This is no time to fall asleep. This is time to prepare... for a coming again of God who is with us, but who now comes to us again for another round of Holy Light, Life, Healing, Wisdom, Justice, Reconciliation, and Peace.

**The images are intense:** Advent is an exciting liturgical season; it is powerful.

a wild man who wears unconventional clothes and eats  
a diet foraged in the dessert, is preparing the way for God!

time is not linear; "With the Lord one day is like a thousand years,  
and a thousand years are like one day. "  
The past, present and the future are being used interchangeably as though  
they all connect now!

Jesus, the One who has come, is coming and will come again, is  
depicted in many ways: as Wisdom, Law Giver, Strong Light, Living  
Branch, Key, and Desire of Nations... something for Everybody.

And all shrouded in Mystery...as Thomas Merton describes it:

"The Advent mystery is the beginning of the end of *all in us that is not yet Christ.*"

**The Advent Wall** ... is a mixture of the Comfort and the Challenge. In an effort to see how these ancient O Antiphons fit into our context. I hope that you will take the time to ponder some of what is there and see how it might help you to prepare for the Coming.

Of the many comforts and challenges on that wall...it is Lawrence Ferlinghetti's poem from 1958 "Christ Climbed Down" that most deeply challenges me. I want to do what he mentions in the conclusion of this poem:

Christ climbed down  
from His bare Tree  
this year  
and ran away to where  
there were no rootless Christmas trees  
hung with candy canes and breakable  
stars...

Christ climbed down  
from His bare Tree  
this year

and softly stole away into  
some anonymous Mary's womb again  
where in the darkest night  
of everybody's anonymous soul  
He awaits again  
**an unimaginable  
and impossible  
Immaculate Conception  
the very craziest of  
Second Comings**

### **The Challenge...**

John the Baptist calls those who go out to the desert to "a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins".

So what is that for us now?

We may think that we are NOT waiting for God to come in that way,  
that we don't want more of that extreme preaching of repentance for the forgiveness of sins".  
But we very much need it.

It is one thing to deal with one's own sin; Forgiveness of sins is about our own sins. Yes, it is.

Advent is different from Lent. It is about repentance, repentance within this spacious, gentle  
beauty...calling us towards this Holy Coming again.

I am very certain there are a number of things for which I need to repent.  
I am also certain that my unawareness of the unintended consequences of much about my life  
insures that I am often unaware of where I need to turn around.  
Advent offers me a time and place to ponder that, gently. That measure, mentioned in the  
collect for today,...is the way that I live "worthy of Christ?"

Forgiveness of sins is also about "**Our sins**"....**all of us**. The forgiveness of sins matters now more  
than ever. For we live in a world, that for the most part, has no effective means for bringing  
back together again what has come apart, through some kind of process of Truth **and**  
Reconciliation. The big picture of "repentance and forgiveness of sins" is more about **the all of**  
**us** and not only isolated individuals apart from each other.

The deeper purpose of communal repentance and the forgiveness of sins is the ultimate  
bringing back together again of what has come apart. The forgiveness of sins has a lot to do  
with the list from that group last Sunday:

renewal  
Truth  
civility  
returning of Light  
Compassion  
healing of brokenness of many kinds  
and respectful coming together of people across differences

## How do Advent and Christmas connect?

As bizarre as it is to hear Christmas carols in October at the store...once in a while...even there some of the marvel that we await comes through. This glorious Feast of the Incarnation is part of what we long for. It holds out Light, Wisdom, Peace, and Love.

We need this "Immaculate Reconciliation of the Second Coming, as well as practices of repentance and the forgiveness of sins that serve to reconcile, rather than banish. And that is what we are offered in the larger picture of the Birth, life, Death and Resurrection of Jesus.

### Conclusion:

Last weekend at the concert on Sat. night...PNW Musicworks and the Whidbey Island Music Festival, Feliz – Baroque - Navidad....

I heard a description of what it is that I am hoping Advent leads me to this year:

in one of the songs, sung in Spanish.

### **!Tu mi Dios entre pajas! Esteban Salas, Cuban (1725- 1803) Trans. Henry Lebedinsky**

The cradle in which  
The Sun of your divinity is [humbled],  
Is the world in which  
The fire of your love shines.

Jesus! Jesus what a flame!  
What an ardent radiance!  
In it the soul is embraced,  
And the heart is kindled.

As we wait together this Advent

"...in the darkest night of everybody's anonymous soul",  
May we notice and join in this  
"... unimaginable and impossibly Immaculate Reconciliation  
the very craziest of Second Comings."

I am waiting for the One who is Advent.  
I am waiting for my heart to be kindled again.  
I am waiting for that very craziest of Second Comings

### What are you waiting for?