

## ADVENT 1

We are clearly in the first Sunday of Advent, preparing for the birth of the Messiah, even though Christians acknowledge that he has already come in the form of Jesus the Son of Mary.

We have joined the historic cries of the Jewish people for God-to-be-with us, when we sing or use the words Immanuel. We know that Jesus came, ministered to the people in word and deed and was crucified for his efforts. These teachings and healings brought forth a significant following which was seen as a threat to the Temple authorities and the Roman occupying forces.

Yet in today's gospel, the first one written after about 40 years after Jesus' death and the destruction of the Temple, we hear about Jesus' prophecy, the end time will come and only and only God knows when. We are to keep alert and awake for that time and look for signs. People have been looking for signs for hundreds of years for we continue on the path of human destruction and waste...let alone the earth's own natural upheavals.

Now, I don't for a minute think that we are being told to embrace sleep deprivation! Nor do I read into this chapter often referred to as a "little apocalypse" that it is all over so just "eat, drink and be merry for tomorrow..."

Rather, I find that there is an anticipation that serves more of a for— shadowing of what will happen, even with the gift of Jesus to humanity already given and received by many. Perhaps in all this, we can find a grace period for us to accept and use this in-between-time well.

One of the examples used in the gospel is that a man/master goes away and leaves his servants to continue to do their work. Well, if we are serving God/the Divine, and we are "left to do our work" what would that be at this time?

If today, as we begin our journey toward Christmas we report that we must— be sure to shop for more things to pile under the Christmas tree; we must be sure to attend as many social events as we can cram into our calendar, we must be sure to hang even more lights this year and the list of busyness goes on and on...with a rush here and a rush there...or a very

long pause at the ferry terminal! I suspect that would not be the work we are called to do—Advent or no Advent. Of course there are gifts to give and carolling and gatherings...but on what scale and at what cost...and not just in money.

It doesn't take much imagination, in fact no imagination at all, we just look around and wonder how well this little space ship earth we are on is doing these days and how the passengers are faring. I think Noah's ark was in better shape than we are!

Earth is riddled with small and large conflicts/wars with all the atrocities committed against non combatants that follow : people forced from homes and then killed leaving, mass kidnappings and starvation, slavery, the degradation of the planet and all its life forms....today's reading could make you shudder with its potential relevance to our time.

So, while we prepare to celebrate the birth of a baby who grew up and could not be held back or held down, even by the most powerful authorities of the day—how do we address in our own lives and times, what that means for us today to live in a state of readiness—as followers of Jesus—readiness for the second coming?

Well, there is good news in all this but we have to read the messages that are written in the faces of those in need, in the streets, on your TV, in the pleas from many credible sources to help—often it is money, often it is time, often it is prayer, often it is writing protest or appeal letters AND....taking time to listen to the heart beat of God.

In fact, I think Advent (mini lent) is a call to give ourselves the gift of getting closer to God. That means taking time away from our calendar time and asking for **Immanuel** (the to-be with God) to be with us for an extra 5, 10, 15 minutes each day. Not only to give prayerful petition but to hear what you and I are called to do...and it is not **everything** no matter how talented we each are! We are never given more than we can handle...some of us just “take on” too much. As beloved Sons and Daughters there is never a call to do more than you have truly been equip and called to do (do in any form).

If we take more “soul time” this Advent, we will be renewed by that anchor which is one of our greatest gifts...HOPE. The anchor of hope is

imbedded in this piece written by Parker Palmer the well known Quaker author and teacher. He writes:

*The soul is generous. It takes in the needs of the work.*

*The soul is wise; it suffers without shutting down.*

*The soul is **hopeful**; it engages the world in ways that keep opening our hearts.*

*The soul is creative; it finds a path between realities that might defeat us and fantasies that are mere escapes.*

Like the people of Israel who would have never imagined that the Immanuel they were calling for to help them would turn out to be born in a cave over the hill from Jerusalem, we can expect to be surprised to when the Christ comes again!

Let us claim the most important aspect of our humanity—hope! And continue to do the work that Jesus did: praying for those in need, feeding those who are hungry, clothing those who are naked and taking every opportunity to heal the breach between our friends, families and the strangers we do not know. In fact, let us become healers of all God's creation!

Some may wonder why we start with **Hope** for the Advent series, and not Joy, or Peace or Love. I think that in many ways we would have no room for those others, if we did not have Hope embedded in our hearts. Hope is another way of expressing that God, through Christ, came to be with us and we *expect* (that is the nature of our hope) he will come again. Embedded in this mystery is the faith that God is still Immanuel and that even death did not nor will not separate us from the Joy, Peace and Love of God in Christ.

Let us listen to Charlie and Lisa play a version of O Come Immanuel...and listen to what the music might stir in you...