

Nov. 27, 2022, Advent 1A  
All Saints', Littleton, NH  
The Rev. Curtis Metzger

Isaiah 2:1-5  
Psalm 122  
Romans 13:11-14  
Matt 24: 36-44

Thoreau, in the beginning of his book *Walden*, wrote  
“I went to the woods because I wished to live deliberately, to front only the essential facts of life, and see if I could not learn what it had to teach, and not, when I came to die, discover that I had not lived. I did not wish to live what was not life, living is so dear; nor did I wish to practice resignation, unless it was quite necessary. I wanted to live deep and suck out all the marrow of life...”

This morning we begin a new year in the Christian calendar – our 4 week withdrawal into Advent in a spirit very much the same as Thoreau’s *Walden*. I say withdrawal because the theme and the lessons of this season are one of watching, waiting, being awake to God, examining oneself and your attentiveness to God. It is a time of contemplation. And isn’t it interesting that these advent themes have a message that is totally counter to the commercialism and busyness that infects us this time every year. On Friday I turned on my car radio just to make sure the ‘old’ tradition was kept – yep, Christmas music starts the day after Thanksgiving! Well, not for us – Advent hymns right up to Christmas Eve! Advent for us, one might say, is more of a walk with Mary, as she prepared to give birth to Jesus. We, like her, need to be aware of how we are pregnant with God. Have you ever thought of it that way?

I’m sure the women who have given birth in the congregation can well relate to this image. Knowing you are carrying something within you that is so great, that ultimately it cannot be contained. Knowing that in giving birth to this life, you have a precious gift and remaining faithful to it will demand perseverance and strength. Knowing how profoundly inescapable is the constant

reminder of the life growing within you. At this point, I should yield the floor and let the mom's in the congregation have fun with this metaphor of how we are all god-bearers, but I'll leave that to coffee hour. (And you do know how tempted I was to come out here with a pillow under my alb!)

The lessons during Advent have 2 themes of anticipation: one of waiting for the Christ, but the other theme traditionally reflected in the lessons of Advent are about the end of the world and the second coming of Christ. As Christians we enter into the movement and anticipation of both these events. In our contemplation of the birth of Christ – the incarnation of God into the world – we enter into a reflective period of our responsibility to live and share this Good News. In anticipation of Christ's coming again, we are challenged to live prepared. There is a great little saying about living a Christian life well prepared: Live as if Christ died yesterday, rose today, and is coming back tomorrow, or as we say in the Eucharist: "Christ has died, Christ is risen, Christ will come again." Advent calls us into that holy, excited anticipation.

The lessons appointed for today teach us about this coming, but if I had to characterize this season in one word, I would say HOPE! – the anticipation of Christ in the world, in our hearts and lives, in our families and communities. In Isaiah we hear the oracle of a new Jerusalem. This small passage of Isaiah actually also appears in the prophet Micah with the added verse: "And every man shall sit under his vine, or under his fig tree, and no one shall make him afraid: for the mouth of the Lord of hosts has spoken." Isaiah's vision is one of hope for peace and the end of war. At the time of the writing it was rooted in the context of the hope of the people of Judah returning from captivity, but later it was interpreted to point to the time of the Messianic kingdom.

Paul speaks to us of 'waking from sleep' – indeed much of the call of Advent is one to wakefulness. Paul speaks hope to a people who believed the end of the world and the second coming of Christ was just around the corner, but who were fearful of what they might have to live through it. His call is to 'put on the armor of light' and be always ready.

Finally, in Matthew, we hear from Jesus about this second coming or, as in Matthew, the coming of the 'Son of Man' --- Jesus' own messianic eschatology. He says that no one will know when it will come, so our call is just to live our faith every day so that we will never be taken by surprise. Indeed, people who live by

faith, who are children of light do not worry about the end of the world or the second coming of Christ, we are too busy just living in the light of God. In doing so, all this other stuff will take care of itself! Some scholars suggest that in fact the 'second coming of Christ' is really his coming into us at our baptism, in the Eucharist, and every day we rise to know that Christ lives in us and we carry him into the world. It is, as it were, being 'awake' to Christ in us.

But hope is a real challenge this year, and yet something we are desperately in need of. The election has frayed nerves and left people anxious, some hopeful, others not so. Russia and Ukraine seem mired in a war of attrition. COVID and Flu are on the rise. Senseless mass shootings carry on as a deadly drum beat. Inflation eats away at our daily lives. Have I stolen your hope away yet?!

So how shall we focus on this call to Hope in Advent. Let me suggest a simple phrase to help you focus: "WAKE UP!" Perhaps you might use this as a preface to your daily prayers—just say 'It's Advent, wake up!' before and after your prayers. In the messages from scripture, in the lives of many saints and mystics, in other religions around the world, this message is heard time and again. And the initial movement is not exterior, as if jumping out of bed; but rather interior. The movement is not springing into action, at least physically, but springing into action mentally. When you say WAKE UP!, remember to stop, think about where you are, what your body is doing and feeling, who you are with and everything about them you can notice, as if watching yourself from outside the scene. You may be startled to find what you notice. You can do all this without anyone having to know.

And then? Then ask yourself where God is here and now.

Is God there in the smile of a child,

The laughter of a colleague,

The quiet loneliness of an elderly person in a shop or on the street,

In the starkness of the late Autumn New England landscape,

In the throngs of people at the mall lost in the haze of commercialism,

Maybe the friendliness of strangers caught up in the season of good will.

And if you can't find God? Well, you might be the bearer of God into the life around you. Maybe, just maybe, they are all waiting for you to bring forth your gift – 'to proclaim the greatness of the Lord'.

Now, let me take you back to our initial image. Do you all now feel pregnant with God? Can you commit yourself to the true spirit of this Advent season and seek the living God hiding in the corners of your life. Can you feel infused with the spirit of Jesus who loved people into a greater sense of the life God has given. Are you prepared to say with Mary:

*My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord and my spirit has rejoiced in God my savior, for he has regarded the low estate of his handmaid.*

And so I bid you enter into this holy season of Advent with a constant longing to be awake to the world around you and to find God in every corner of your world, or to be, like Mary, the God-bearer to your world. I bid you to live with the expectation and hope that being pregnant with God will bring to the world.

[Now, repeat after me...V: "It's Advent." R: "wake up!"]

In conclusion I would like to share an evening canticle of Thanksgiving from the Canadian Book of Alternative Services – one of my favorites that seems to capture the spirit of the season so well:

*Blessed are you, O lord our God, ruler of the universe, creator of light and darkness. In this holy season, when the sun's light is swallowed up by the growing darkness of the night, you renew your promise to reveal among us the splendor of your glory, enfleshed and visible to us in Jesus Christ your Son. Through the prophets you teach us to hope for his reign of peace. Through the outpouring of his Spirit, you open our blindness to the glory of his presence. Strengthen us in our weakness. Support us in our stumbling efforts to do your will and free our tongues to sing your praise. For to you all honour and blessing are due, now and forever. Amen.*