

First Sunday of Advent
November 29, 2020
Trinity Lutheran Church
Lay Minister- Terry Vear

Grace to you and Peace from God Our Father and the Lord, Jesus Christ.

Good Morning to all of you who have tuned in virtually for the First Sunday of Advent Service. It is rare to be asked but an honor to serve as Lay Minister in Pastor's absence as she takes a most deserved break this Thanksgiving Holiday and enjoys both rest and rejuvenation. Rarer still that I am doing it virtually, given these unprecedented times.

While moving to a virtual platform may be easy for many of you- there's a reputation I have earned over the years and that is, if it's technological and "easy", in my competent hands or I am within distance, it will randomly break down, disconnect, freeze up or go wacky-

- just last week I was joining a virtual meeting and everyone on the call kept saying "what is that whistling? What's making that noise?". Everything sounded and looked fine on my end but, given my reputation, they asked me to unplug my head set and replug it in and sure enough it was me 😊. And so today I come before you with the confidence that in this particular situation, God will prevail and shine his omnipresent light on us all.

As has happened in the past, when I have been asked to fill in as Lay minister for pastor, I find the preparation, process, and journey in preparing a sermon, enlightening albeit challenging. How many times have you heard that saying, it's not the destination it's the journey and I find that to be true in this. I learn and grow in my faith, as I otherwise probably wouldn't and as Pastor Hahn always reminds me to do, "go where the spirit leads you".

Along with a number of resources, commentaries and different perspectives, including lectionary notes from Gail Renshaw, regarding today's readings, the Holy Spirit usually does 'lead me' to seek out further readings and interpretations within both a historical and current context. And in so doing, find clarity in a message I needed to hear that I wasn't necessarily looking for:

Stay strong. Carry on.

For the past eight months our lives have been turned upside down and our routines reconfigured, reimagined and redefined. I don't believe I'm the lone voice who, during this time has lamented, about the challenges and prayed for the fortitude and resilience to endure and carry on. Whether it has been through my work and implementing best protocols to keep both employees and clients safe, my friends who remain at least a

reassuring voice on the phone or my immediate family who -with some I have, of late, been estranged from due to differing opinions, my usual optimistic nature and strong faith have been sorely tested. And my patience maybe not as patient as usual. Like so many of you, navigating this new COVID reality is discombobulating. These are uncertain times. Cynthia Bourgeault in her essay *Ordinary and Spiritual Awareness* advocates for a spiritual awareness by using the example of navigating in the fog; one must pay attention to delicate signs of change in the immediate environment in order to find one's way." Even though my car doesn't come equipped with fog lights , I'm much more adapt at navigating in the fog then I was a few months ago.

In Isiah we hear a similar lament from a people who have had their hopes shattered and a plea for God to reveal himself again with the assurance that, in times past, God has done so. Isaiah's confession speaks to my heavy heart amidst these turbulent times and provides, in spite of the challenges, words of hope. We ask to be saved from "the hand of our iniquity" and returned to the hand of the one who created us. During Advent we are called to ready ourselves for the coming of the Son of God. While we are not sure when that may be, we are called to stay alert and pay attention and address those things that can no longer wait. Stay strong. Carry on.

"Yet o Lord, you are our 'Father, we are the clay and you are our potter, WE ARE ALL the work of your hand." Isiah calls to God who has saved them in the past and believes he will do so again.

In Psalm 80 we hear a similar lament in the verse,

Restore Us O God; let your face shine upon us and we shall be saved."

Our task then becomes to be strong in the face of adversity knowing that in the face of uncertainty lies hope and in that hope, the reassurance God's will, will prevail.

Michael Coogin in *A Brief Introduction to the Old Testaments* explains that a lament in simple terms is an *appeal for divine help in distress* however a lament can also have a set format which may include: an address to God, a description of the suffering or anguish one seeks relief to, a petition for help and deliverance, a curse towards ones enemies or a belief in one's innocence or a confession of the lack thereof, a vow corresponding to an expected divine response and lastly, a song of Thanksgiving. And how many times during these last few months have I, with humble resignation, had to remind myself that, "thy will be done" not "my will be done" makes the situation at hand easier to bear.

Advent comprises the four Sundays before Christmas. Each year, the first Sunday deals with our readiness for divine judgment, the second Sunday- the ministry of John the Baptist, the third Sunday the Baptist's call to a repentant life and on the fourth Sunday a narrative concerning the birth of Jesus. A celebration of thanksgiving.

In today's Gospel, Mark addresses us with promises that the signs of the coming of the Son of Man will include the darkening of the sun and the moon will not give light and the stars will be falling from the heavens" but knowing this don't forget that hope still remains a constant, "truly I tell you, this generation will not pass away until all these things have taken place. Heaven and earth will pass away but my words will not pass away"

The promise of Advent is that God is always at work in the world, bringing new beginnings and a new creation to people and powers long bent on destruction. However, because we live in the generation that exists between the "already" of Christ's resurrection and the "not yet" of God's full restoration of creation, we cannot know when that day will arrive. We are reminded in today's readings to live our lives in a state of preparedness –
- To stay awake and alert. To stay strong and carry on.

It has been difficult over the last several months to not become despondent, fearful, angry, and lost amid the continued chaos that seems to be looming around us. The ongoing pandemic, racial unrest, record setting forest fires, record breaking hurricane season, and political polarization has negatively cost lives and left many families bereft. Some in losing their homes and others in losing loved ones to COVID.

These are the life challenges that continue to separate and move us, and the communities we live in, further apart instead of bringing us closer together. We hear in today's readings that God hears all our lamentations and that our home is God's home and is coming once again to dwell with us. So let us be the change we wish to see. Let us be the beacon of hope and shelter from the storms that lift others up in strength and unity. Let us embrace the choice each and every one of us have to be that light in the darkness for others, a welcome respite to those in need of healing and rejoice in the opportunity we all have to grow kinder and more compassionate. To seek and spread joy as we are able as I don't need to tell you we could all use a little more joy in our days, these days.

To help others, realizing we are in this together and can each individually be a blessing to our community and those we serve. To seek truth in all circumstances for the common good, no matter the difficulty or cost. Our church without walls, as we reach out to others virtually, and with adjusted safety protocols in place at King's Kupboard, gives us the opportunity to connect with others more, even though we remain physically disconnected.

To stay strong and carry on.

To learn new ways of doing things and in so doing create a new routine that builds and fosters a community that cares about others and in so doing lets our deeds speak our creed. Amid the not knowing, to take solace and find peace in the, what's coming but not here yet. Advent calls us to hope for things unseen but offers reassurance that good things are coming as we wait for the revealing of our Lord, Jesus Christ.

This positive hope, as Linda Grenz in Homilies for the Christian People writes, *comes from knowing that we already belong to Christ and already live in communion with him and each other. Through grace we are made ready to meet Christ both in our daily lives and in the Day of Judgment.*

As Advent begins we are invited to practice hope in tomorrow and remember as

Dr. Martin Luther King in his famous sermon, *Remaining Awake Through a Great Revolution* said, "one of the great liabilities of life is that all too many people find themselves living amid a great period of social change and yet they fail to develop the new attitudes, the new mental response that the new situation demands." To remember,

" That the time is always ripe to do what is right."

And so as we listen to the hymn of the day *Hark a Thrilling Voice is Sounding* "let us take its lyrics and God's message throughout our daily life...

"So when next he comes in glory and the world is wrapped in fear, he will shield us with his mercy and with words of love draw near."

"Honor, glory, might and, blessing to the Father and the son with everlasting Spirit, while unending ages run".

Blessings of good health and steadfast assurance of God's undying love to all of you.

Stay strong and carry on.

Thanks be to God.

Amen