

December 3, 2023  
First Sunday in Advent

Prelude

Lighting the Candle of Hope      Members of Collegium Musicum

Reader 1: In the days of exile and uncertainty, the prophet Isaiah cried out:  
O that you would tear open the heavens and come down so that the mountains would quake at your presence. As when fire sets twigs ablaze and causes water to boil, come down to make your name known to your enemies and cause nations to quake before you! For when you did awesome things that we did not expect, you came down, and the mountains trembled before you.

Isaiah 64:1-3

Reader 2: In the midst of our own encounters with uncertainty and our longing for deliverance, Jesus calls to us: “Therefore, keep awake—for you do not know when the master of the house will come.” Mark 13:35

**Congregation: We wait as people surprised again and again by God, who shakes us out of our complacency and wakes us up to the work of the kin-dom all around us.**

Reader 1: We light this candle as a sign of our shocking hope. May we stay awake to God’s activity around us, for even at this hour, God is with us and is working to restore the world to right relationship with God and one another.

\*Hymn 82    Come, Thou Long Expected Jesus

Prayer of Confession

**God of the future, you are coming in power to bring all nations under your rule. We confess that we have not expected your kingdom, for we live causal lives, ignoring your promised judgment. We accept lies as truth, exploit neighbors, abuse the earth, and refuse your justice and peace. In your mercy, forgive us. Grant us wisdom to welcome your way, and to seek things that will endure when Christ comes to judge the world.**

Hymn 698    Take, O Take Me As I Am

Assurance of Pardon

Surely God is our salvation, we will trust in God and not be afraid, for the Lord God is our Strength and Might. Shout aloud and sing for joy...for great in our midst is the Holy One of Zion, and he will save the people from their sins. Know you are forgiven and be at peace.

Old Testament Reading      Isaiah 64:1-9

Time With Our Young Disciples

Gospel Reading              Mark 13:24-37

The Morning Message

“In my beginning is my end.”

These are the words of TS Elliot in *Four Quartets*. Much of what we believe about God and Jesus is reflected therein: the God who made us will be the God who judges us; Christ is the Alpha and the Omega; the God who created the world out of nothing will at its consummation be “all in all.”

So, with ritual cycles. We begin them where we end. The Advent season begins the liturgical year and the lectionary cycle with stories about the end time. In fact, we’ve been visiting those scriptures for a few weeks now. These scriptures say, “Stay awake! Live in expectation!” Watch for the signs of God!” Watch for the signs of the reign of God!” But in our end is our beginning: the signs of God’s reign point us to something new and unfamiliar.

The colors for Advent are deep blue or purple. For some, the blue reflects the color of late Autumn’s night, a sky lit by moon and stars. The days are short. The long nights mark the end of the year’s growing season. But the long nights are fertile ground for dreaming- imagine the desert blossoming and sheltering a mother and child; imagine peace prevailing; imagine God all in all. Joseph dreams in this season-of the child to be here soon, whom he is to name Emmanuel, God-with-us.

I love to find expressions of hope in art and music and literature. Sometimes they are so different from my own experience that they startle me and I miss the beauty and the message. In many of the stores which sell items produced by cottage communities, we may find art work from Africa or Latin America-places in which hope is often hard to find. There is a style of cross popular in El Salvador that depicts hope in a world of despair. It takes a fertile imagination to project that hope. In one of these crosses, a woman stands at the cross beam, arms stretched wide, reminding us of Jesus on the cross at Calvary. Her expression is one of victory, though, and after all, that is the eternal hope we claim, the death and resurrection of Jesus, and in his resurrection is the promise of ours. Surrounding the woman are images of Salvadorans going about their daily tasks-teaching, healing, farming-in the extraordinary time of war. They persevere because they cling to God-with-us, Emmanuel.

Sometimes we find hope closer to home. Clara Rose has expressed her delight in spending time with her grandchildren, who are now raising their children. In them, she finds hope. Their young lives demonstrate an active intentionality, an embracing of purpose and responsibility, parenting richly flavored with love and grace.

Where do you see or hear signs of God's in-breaking reign? For me, it's music. My life has been filled with it. I would wake in the summer to my grandmother's students practicing scales and beginner pieces, progressing to the classics, hymns and popular tunes. I seriously considered a career in music, but, my piano skills were weak and I followed a different path. But, I married a musician, and the blessings continue, especially at Christmas time.

Maybe you find signs of God's in-breaking rule in doing for others, helping in a time of crisis, being the friend who listens, or sitting with the suffering, simply bearing witness to their pain.

Maybe you work for needed change in a public way. This takes heaps of courage. One of my dear pastor friends, Stephen Baldwin, has served as a state senator for several years. He lost his race in the recent election. On Facebook, someone made the comment that he would be missed by area citizens. To which came a quick reply that he wasn't going anywhere...you don't need to have a title to serve. True, Stephen, and thanks for the challenge.

Advent is a fertile time to watch and dream. The world's needs are great. God is greater.

It was for this season that Miriam Therese Winter penned these lovely lines:

Root of Jesse

Rising

From many an ancient prophecy

Promised child

To all who would be reconciled

Breaks through at last.

A virgin shoot accepts

God's seed

Bows to the Mighty Deed.

One branch

Bears bud, flower, fruit:

Christ blossoms on David's root.

Lord, you are stem, stalk, tree!

Let your fruit take root in me.

The Message in Song     Collegium Musicum, Cabell Midland High School

\*Affirmation of Faith    The Apostles' Creed   p. 35

\*Hymn 581   Gloria Patri

Presenting Our Tithes and Offerings

Offertory

\*Hymn    Christmas Doxology (insert)

\*Prayer of Dedication

**Holy One, in this season, we wait in hope.**

**and we give in hope:**

**hope for your coming reign,**

**hope of your presence with us even now.**

**Receive our gifts, that they may be used to bring hope to our community and beyond.**

**Amen.**

\*Hymn 92        While We Are Waiting, Come

\*Blessing

Go now, and let the Lord steer you in the way of truth.

Be on your guard so that you will not be caught up in the anxieties of the world.

Be alert at all times and pray for strength to escape the traps  
that would keep you from God.

\*Postlude