

Sermon Preached by Pr. Jennifer Rose

Advent 1A

November 27, 2016

“Walking in the Light of the Lord”

Dear friends in Christ: Grace be unto you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Happy New Year! Today we celebrate first Sunday of Advent - the first Sunday in the church calendar - a new year in the church. In Advent we work on preparing, being ready, making a way for Jesus - our Messiah and King - our Prince of Peace - to enter our lives. It seems ironic that year after year we celebrate the coming of the Prince of Peace. And year after year the newspaper headlines keep repeating the same stories. Different countries are involved the devastation and tragedy of war. There is hate and despair in society because of pain and human suffering. There is the injustice of hunger and poverty... the senselessness of brutal murders and violence... racism and sexism. Sometimes it feels like, different year, same story.

We rush into this season of preparation, absorbed in a million things that we need to get done -- the baking christmas goodies, the planning and organizing family dinners, shopping for Christmas presents, sending out Christmas cards and letters - putting up the tree and the Christmas lights, panicking about whether we have a gift for every person we need a gift for... it can all be overwhelming and we can become so absorbed in all there is to do that we miss the meaning of the season all together. Many of us also approach this season with a sense of loss. There are some missing pieces in our lives. The Christmas carols on the radio lack that usual note of joy and celebration. And we are preoccupied with worries, grief, and just a plain emptiness that engulfs our lives. Perhaps we can't explain why, but all our feelings and deepest longings seem to reach a peak during the Advent season.

The whole world is eagerly awaiting salvation from God. Our souls are searching for a sign from God. Often without even realizing it, our soul hungers for an inner peace that cannot be achieved through human efforts, but can come from God alone. We seek for guidance from God. Where does our world go looking for God? Where does our world hope to find salvation?

People look in a lot of different places for God - in science and space exploration - In education and personal achievement. In retail stores, in food, at the gym and even pornography. Where do you go knocking for God? Where do you go to find that source of comfort and peace when you feel restless? The Prophet Isaiah invites us to anticipate a time when all people and nations will turn toward God. Isaiah anticipates a time when the whole world will turn to God for light and direction. *The word that Isaiah son of Amoz saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem. In days to come the mountain of the Lord's house shall be established as the highest of the mountains, and shall be raised above the hills; all the*

*nations shall stream to it. Many peoples shall come and say, "Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob; that he may teach us his ways and that we may walk in his paths." For out of Zion shall go forth instruction, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem. He shall judge between the nations, and shall arbitrate for many peoples; they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more. O house of Jacob, come, let us walk in the light of the Lord!*

This passage from the Book of Isaiah comes from around 740 BCE. It was a time when Assyria was threatening to overrun Syria and Palestine. The Northern Kingdom of Israel had formed a coalition with neighboring nations in order to repel Assyria. They had asked the Southern Kingdom of Judah to join them. Isaiah, the prophet, had spoken out clearly against such military coalitions, and instead called on the people to trust in God's way. Isaiah's prophecy calls on the people to look to Mount Zion and the temple as symbols of their salvation. He paints a vivid picture of God's realm which will come if we learn to walk in God's way. It is a world where relationships between people have been restored and made whole. No one will be hungry or at war. All of the weapons will be turned into tools for food production. The people of Israel were waiting for a cataclysmic event, that would usher in the rule of the Messiah. They were waiting for God Himself to come down from His heavenly throne and destroy their enemies once and for all. Israel expected the Messiah to be a mighty military figure. They expected a King with chariots, armies, purple robe and all.

Therefore the people were disappointed when the prophet announced a child's birth. We read in Isaiah 11 *"He will not judge by what he sees with his eyes, or decide by what he hears with his ears; but with righteousness he will judge the needy, with justice he will give decisions for the poor of the earth. He will strike the earth with the rod of his mouth; with the breath of his lips he will slay the wicked. Righteousness will be his belt and faithfulness the sash around his waist. The wolf will live with the lamb, the leopard will lie down with the goat, the calf and the lion and the yearling together; And A Little Child Will Lead Them."*

Can you imagine their reaction? "What does a little child know about leading?" "We need a mighty King -- a warrior." "How can God reveal Himself through a small child?"

We too journey into the advent season, expecting great things to happen. We hope that God will bring peace among fighting nations. We hope that God will somehow intervene and stop the ozone depletion and global pollution. We wait for God to do something about poverty and corrupt governments. On a more personal level, we expect God to do something special to keep our family ties strong. We hope that the various Christmas programs will touch people's hearts, and that the story of our Savior's birth will deepen our desire for God. We wait for extra-ordinary things to happen, that will lead us to walk in God's light. We expect God to do some magic for us.

But, if that is all we're waiting for, we may be as surprised as the Israelites when the people came from all tribes and nations, saying, *"Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob; that he may teach us his ways and that we may walk in his paths.."*

The apostle Paul wrote to the Romans, "you know what time it is, how it is now the moment for you to wake from sleep. For salvation is nearer to us now than when we became believers; the night is far gone, the day is near. Let us then lay aside the works of darkness and put on the armor of light; let us live honorably as in the day, not in reveling and drunkenness, not in debauchery and licentiousness, not in quarreling and jealousy. Instead, put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires."

My encouragement to you, dear friends, is that you look for God's presence out in the world - not only in extraordinary events, but in ordinary places and events of our daily lives. Let us look at the newborn child in Bethlehem and praise God for the miracle of grace and forgiveness. Let us look into the eyes of pain and suffering in our society -- those suffering from incurable disease, those in times of extreme financial difficulty -- and find God in these places that seem perhaps unlikely. Let us look for God among the abandoned and outcasts. Let us look for God in a simple manger.

The time has come. The birth, and the death and resurrection of the son of God, marks the turning point in history. With the birth of Jesus God turned on the light, that we may follow in the ways of God. Jesus provides us with a new understanding of God will for humanity. God's promise that he will lead us, and teach us, and show us the way, sets us free to walk in the light. The assurance of God's victory over sin and death gives us the confidence to seek His light, and to follow where He leads us. People and nations will come to God's way and find rest.

Advent is not only a time of remembering the events leading up to Christmas. It is not only looking back to the events that took place in a dimly lit stable in Bethlehem. Advent is a period of preparation also for the Second Coming Of Christ. It is a time when we are encouraged to walk in anticipation of Christ's return. Isaiah encourages us to embrace this hope for a future with God, *"Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the LORD rises upon you. 2 See, darkness covers the earth and thick darkness is over the peoples, but the LORD rises upon you and his glory appears over you. 3 Nations will come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your dawn. 4 "Lift up your eyes and look about you: All assemble and come to you; your sons come from afar, and your daughters are carried on the arm. 19 The sun will no more be your light by day, nor will the brightness of the moon shine on you, for the LORD will be your everlasting light, and your God will be your glory.*

Walking in the light means to be prepared. Walking in God's light requires that we put our hope in God alone -- not in food, programs, or being a good person. When we walk in God's light we live each day as if it were our last. It means looking for signs of God in the everyday events in our lives. It means taking the opportunities, which God gives us, to also help others see the light of Christ.

The season of Advent provides us with many challenges and opportunities to walk in the light of Christ. As God's people, let us be witnesses of the Savior's love, who came to dwell among us - to live with us, to suffer with us, and yes, to also celebrate with us.

Come, let us walk in God's light. Thanks be to God. Amen.