

The Advent Of The Lord Is Now...US!

“/Am Wondering...Both And?”

Philippians 1:3-11; Baruch 4:36, 5:1-9;

Luke 3:2c-6

December 5, 2021

Second Week of Advent

And this second week of Advent,
We journey on paying attention, being
astonished and telling/living it...less we
fall into the trap of our culture’s
perspectives.

Baruch, who is prophet of the Hebrew
people during their exile, in the same
time frame as Jeremiah,
sets a back drop or maybe that *future*
drop...

for our waiting, an active waiting.

Within Advent’s waiting time...dark and
rich, expectant and uneasy, energized
yet quiet,

he names what is “yet to be” as a
return from exile...a time of our
honor, of light, mercy, and
righteousness/justice. Great
peace!

Return from exile...

What exiles do you long to return from?
From where have you been banished?

What parts of yourself have you forced
into exile
in order to cope with/accommodate the
way things seem...

parts of yourself that so long to return
to the living of each day?

Calling us to resist and renew is the
confident proclamation of God’s

steadfast love, calling us back from
exile...

every fragrant tree shading every step of
the way.

God cares about your exile, your return.

But as I look around this world and its
cycles of famine, war, poverty,
increasing gun violence, and
institutionalized injustices of
racism/classism/sexism and more,

I wonder what this passage has to offer
beyond a superficial image of hang in
there....

“it will be all better.”

At first hearing, it may seem Baruch
offers a classic fairy tale happy-ily ever
after ending that so often doesn’t really
seem to come true, or measure up!

But you know if I go deeper,
pay special attention to that *first* verse,

I begin to be astonished...I begin to hear
something very powerful and potent that
doesn’t delude or sugar coat.

Listen again... “Take off the garment of
your affliction and sorrow....and put on
the beauty of the glory of God, the robe
of justice that comes from God.”

Do both, not take off and stand naked,
not put on a superficial glory without
having examined

what’s wearing you down...

See justice and put it on.

Do both...*then you are* crowned with
Peace everlasting ...a peace that
withstands all life’s circumstances.

So...don't just take it when you've had "quite enough",
isolate yourself, give up....*no!*

Look for justice and put it on....tell it/live it

Don't take the abuse, do something about it.

Don't just see the injustices of hunger and housing and gun violence, do something about it.

This is a call to return from exile to the land of your birth...
a just land where you are honored for who you are...
a call to experience Christmas, be Christmas!

As a people...you...

~must be willing to lay down your identity of affliction in which you cloak yourself...

~take off the riot gear you wear to make your way through hectic days and mobs,

~the uniforms and flak jacket you wear to defend yourself against what seems an endless onslaught,

~take off the mantle of self-righteousness where you justify your agendas...

~the mantles of entitlement on your shoulders full of pride and self-justification to do what you want to do the way you want to do it,

Lay down the routine of your sorrow and affliction.

*Sorrow and affliction every day and a choice we make each day to wear it as armor **or** take it off.

*To move from "quite enough!" to "...quite enough!"
Move to that rarified moment...be Advent!

I hear a personal invitation to transformation...

instructions for living a life!

...my own! Lay it down Karen. Take it off Karen.

Off your shoulders. Out of your thoughts. No more!

Exile is over.

Do you hear me, Karen? What are you waiting for?

This is wonderful good news.

The same and yet different good news for each of us
for we each have our own sorrows and afflictions ...
and for each, resistance and renewal are possible.

One size does not necessarily fit all and neither does one way of walking God's path,
one way to pray for God's courage.

Paul prays...over the church in Philippi which was his first church.

In a very conflicted time and church that threatens its own members,
he does not retaliate in tone or try to convince them of anything of which they are not
willing to be convinced.

Instead he stays true to himself and his mission.

He prays and stays....dressed appropriately for the occasion!

His prayer is that their love is their heart, the heart of the matter. That this love will
overflow with knowledge and insight.

Knowledge and insight flow from the heart...not the head.
He invites them, haven take off their sorrow and affliction,
to put on: Wisdom.

He's praying them...Advent into Christmas.
A wise holy day, full of love...the verb.

And beware: Christian love easily devolves into
a contentment, complacency, with who we already are,
as if we have nothing to prepare or refine,
and nowhere to grow.

Easily we resist, justify, and retaliate...we "Christians".
Not Paul. Not Jesus. And no...not Christians!

Paul calls us to a rigorous love, one that leads through discernment to lives that are
pure and blameless
because they are abundant in justice.

Paul's love is not abstract feeling, but a
dedicated and consecrated way of being in relationship
with self, neighbor, creation, God.

No, there is no exile in the new order....*instead,*
We have a new heart full of knowledge and insight.
A new heart to be a new community!

How do we hear this as community, here, today at Tippe?

Do we dare to expect a certain level of commitment from each of us/all of us to Be Advent...to make just choices in our lives and for our community?

A commitment that is rooted in a mature, insightful, active love?

Are we busy sowing and tending seeds of justice or are we content to talk about the need for justice?

Are we indeed a covenant Christmas community?

And John the Baptizer lifts up these very issues in his call to the people.

What does it mean to be called to repentance over and over and over...not just a positioning of our perceived best interest, but true repentance and renewal?

Marcus Borg says the word “forgiveness” literally means from its Greek root:
to go beyond the mind we have.

God offers forgiveness...offers you a new garment,
a new mind with new possibilities.

The heart to resist that which is not life giving,
renewed in grace.

But it's your work to do put it on...to do something
with your new mind!

To tell it...live it.

**Repentance, turning your life around...
that's the part that's up to you, not God...
the do-over is offered, but you have to do it!**

Forgiveness points us to the path
so we can be on our way, the Way!
God is smoothing out a way for us...hey,
Most of those hills and mountains of resistance...well...
they're in us! And, so is God!

We are a people being offered forgiveness, offered salvation ...the chance to put things back in the right order.

Salvation is living in new ways with a new mind...
healed here as we live, not later as we die.

What might it mean to ready ourselves for God this Advent,
not merely by creating beautiful home and worship spaces, decorated with Christmas trees and garland...

but to ready ourselves by straightening out
what is crooked in our hearts and minds that is holding us back and keeping us exiled?

Are you ready to smooth what is rough in your soul?

Lowering some of your pride?

Lifting up some of your humility and energy?

John and Paul call to us to live against the ways of the world.

Then as now...the daily news of crisis after crisis,
can overcome us.

We're troubled.

Perhaps you find yourself anguished with sorrow and affliction.

And when you are in a place of deep anguish, it's hard to hear anything above the call of your own desperation.

Hard to hear God calling and to go beyond the mind you have, having had enough,
and resist being tipped over into complacency.

In these times, will you find your real
Advent-Christmas courage and "dress your life"
in ways you can come back from your exile?

Will you hear and respond to this amazing offer of inner and outer peace...

or will you put on an emotional Band-Aid
(rather than a robe of justice) and just get through?

Are you really willing to settle for so little?

Or, will you listen for the nuanced call of Advent/Christmas?

It is so much more than intriguing,
more than a story with a happy ending.

Advent agitates us to go deeper,
to that longing and restlessness.
To resist so you can be renewed.

So often we jump right into Christmas and let its comfort seduce us...into doing
nothing more than buying
Christmas presents and baking cookies?

We can...yes, we can let Advent nudge us to know and want more of something quite
different
from all the seasonal, marketed bliss?

This is a safe place... mountains lowered and valleys raised... a place and time for you to
listen,
to hear God saying:

It could be different for you!

For...
Your deepest aspiration, may be wings for spirit.
Your fear, an aspect of your yearning.
Your obedience, your freedom.
Your doubt, your witness of faith.

For the opposite of faith is not doubt, it is certainty.
The opposite of love is not hate, but fear.

And this is a story full of faith embracing doubt
calling to us: Be not afraid!

...Will I pay attention?
...Will I let myself be astonished?
...Will I tell about it?

Advent is taking place around me! It's in me!
The Advent of our Lord is...US!

Holy One, help us to re-dress our hearts!