

Advent 2
Year C 2021 Luke 3:1-6
Dec. 5 2021
Rev. Betsy Welliver Sentigar
Christ Church Towanda, PA 1884

There is an ancient Celtic belief, taught to us by Erigena, that salvation happened primarily through the incarnation rather than the crucifixion. It was the bringing together of heaven and earth, spirit and matter, creator and creation, that healed the world. Jesus is the celestial physician, the healer of the material universe, and he came to a world which was very sick. The world was out of balance (and still is) and the incarnation restored balance (and it stills does).¹

There's a voice crying in the wilderness.

John the Baptist comes from nowhere and it is in the middle of nowhere, where he receives the Word of God. Luke gives as much attention to the naming of the annunciation of John as to the advent of our Savior.

Furthermore, the words from Luke this morning echo Isaiah 40 in speaking of John's ministry. In fact we are alongside those in the OT who waited for the coming of the Christ. The exiled, the marginalized, the weary can be assured of renewal. Their strength shall be renewed, they shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not hunger.²

John's preaching prepared Israel for the advent of Jesus; his summons to renewal prepares us in our day for the second advent of Christ as well as for the celebration of Christmas.³

As is the case with every liturgical season, Advent underscores aspects of our life in Christ that are true throughout the year.

Advent is the season of expectation, preparation and hope -

(1) **Expectation:** Expectation brings hope in future where the grim present does not have the final say. Personal and collective redemption is the invitation. Our hearts are yearning for the incarnation of our Lord. The Spirituality of Advent is marked by this: "O, that you would tear open the heavens and come down".

¹ Justin Counts Quotation - *Contemplative Outreach*

² *Isaiah 40:37*

³ Julia Gatta. *Life in Christ; Practicing Christian Spirituality*. Church Publishing Inc. 2018. pg. 110.

(2) **Preparation:** Directives of the prophet - John

Advent offers us a time for this spiritual practice. John demands that we get ready for Jesus.⁴ Before we can bask in Christmas joy and the birth of the baby, we must examine ourselves and our world. In the style of the OT prophets before him, John challenges Advent people with a message of personal and corporate self-examination. Advent, John reminds us is a time to prepare to invite Jesus and not simply our houseguests.⁵ It is a rendering of the heart, preparing it through metanoia (Greek word meaning : a turning about - reorientation) via forgiveness and clearing the path for God's work in us. John asks us to turn away from sin towards God, to seek God's forgiveness and prepare the way of the Lord. Vigilance, for instance, is a crucial spiritual practice. It demands that we pay attention to what is going on inside us, around us, discerning what is of God and what is not. Naturally, this leads —as John the Baptist would tell us —to ongoing repentance. Vigilance also embraces the holy expectation of meeting Christ, sometimes when we least anticipate it.⁶ The spiritual practice which prepares us is called reconciliation. Repentance is a holy discipline. The rite of sacramental reconciliation is a practice in the Episcopal Church which has found a growing awareness since the 1979 BCP. This discipline of self-examination through prayer and preparation offers an opportunity for renewal of life and deeper conversion to God. This is a sacramental gift is available to everyone and can be assisted with the help with guidance from one with experience. I previously had no knowledge of this thinking that it was relegated to the Roman Catholic Church. My mentor brought me along this path to understand what is available to all Christians. - the forgiveness of God, not as a general truth or vague promise, but personally, immediately, in actual experience and in real time. God is the one who yearns for our pardon and our peace.⁷ As a practice this sacrament may become a holy discipline in regular seasons of the church year to include Advent and Lent. In the BCP you can find "The Rite of Reconciliation of a Penitent"

(3) **Hope:** The world of the Old Testament was that of forsaken exiles in despair. It did not know that any new beginning was possible. The only way to overcome despair was a public demonstration of hope.

⁴ Feasting on the Word Advent 2

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ Rev. Martin L. Smith SSJE "Reconciliation - Preparing for Confession in the Episcopal Church. Cowley Publications 1985. pp1-3.

To bring balance, we need to look to the hope of Christ's in breaking in the world. Hope is needed. The world of the Old Testament was that of forsaken exiles in despair. It did not know that any new beginning was possible. The only way to overcome despair was a public demonstration of hope.

As community, we are called to amazement that will not be prevented by despair which we encounter. Christ Church, like the early church and all other churches struggle with how to begin its take on Jesus. We are always beginning again. The focus of Jesus' coming is the inauguration of a new thing. Beyond human understanding and control, Jesus' in breaking through God into human existence is possible because God is God and God is faithful to new promises.⁸

We, like Israel are brought to a sense of a new historical beginning by the action of God. The prophetic voice, like we hear this morning instructs us to experience a prophetic energizing, which its characteristic hope. We engage in amazement that will not be thrown down by despair.

Jesus will be the fulfillment of God's purpose which will bring newness and energy to life. May our Advent journeys be a place of expectation, preparation and hope which brings God's fulfillment to us.

Almighty God, your loving hands have given us all that we need to possess in our preparation for the coming of your son, Jesus Christ. Give us grace to honor you with our bodies, minds, and souls in that we may acquire the mind of Christ to love and serve the world in the preparation of His most holy birth. O come, O come Emmanuel. Amen.

⁸ Walter Bruggeman *The Prophetic Imagination*

