

The 2nd Sunday of Advent: Holy Trinity Church: December 4, 2016

Isaiah 11: 1-10, Romans 15: 4-13, Matthew 3:1-12:

Sometime-Somewhere-Somehow-Something Good

Preached

By

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In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

There are two basic attitudes toward life, one of hope and one of dread, one of trust, the other of fear, one of optimism, the other of gloom and doom. I once read a misprint for a weather forecast which read, “There is a five percent chance of . . . today and tomorrow.” I would hope that the odds are better than that!

After this local and national election, I am hearing in conversations and meeting that there are some people who are living with such feelings of anger, fear, dread, gloom and doom about their lives and their future that they dismissed even the possibility of joy. Even when life is being good to them, they just know that it cannot last. Somewhere--sometime--somehow--

something out there is going to happen to them that will wreck their best-laid plans, that will frustrate their fondest dreams that will crush everything they hold near and dear.

That is one attitude towards life. Fortunately, it is not the Christian attitude.

It was not St. Paul's attitude to be sure. St. Paul knew that we live in a difficult world. God knows, the founder of our church, had experienced more than his share of sorrows and sufferings. But St. Paul knew that somewhere--sometime--somehow--something good was out there waiting for him. He knew that tomorrow would be a better day than today. Paul believed that lasting joy and peace were not only possibilities in life but would someday be permanent realities. That is why he writes in Romans 15:13, "*May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.*" This is the season of the year when we celebrate the God of hope. The mood of Advent is one of joyful anticipation that seeps slowly, steadily and quietly into our souls.

My brothers and sisters in Christ, the bells, the lights, all the sights and sounds of this special time of the year speak to us about hope. God is alive.

Love and peace and good will are still possibilities. There is far more than a five percent chance of today and tomorrow because of a baby born over 2,000

years ago in a little town called Bethlehem. Hope came into our world. Hope that is unquenchable and eternal.

H.G. Wells once wrote a story titled “In the Days of the Comet.” The story is a somewhat typical science fiction fantasy. A mysterious green vapor of unknown origin descends from the clouds and covers the earth. The vapor has the immediate effect of putting all the earth’s people into a deep sleep for three days. When they finally awake, something amazing has happened. Their inner nature is radically transformed. Petty quarreling comes to an end. Instead of seeking fame, power and wealth the people of the world seek to serve one another. Love, kindness and generosity become more important than greed or success. In short, the perfect society emerges, a society in which the dignity of every human being is honored.

In our reading from the Hebrew Scriptures today, the prophet Isaiah looked forward to that kind of day. He looked forward to a day when “*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.*” Of course, Isaiah was not anticipating a green vapor that would come down out of the clouds. He was prophesying “*a shoot that would come from the stump of Jesse . . .*” That is Isaiah’s way of saying that there was a Messiah coming, who would

establish a new world order, who would bring into being a new kingdom in which love is more important than money and power and service is more important than domination and oppression.

John the Baptist saw himself as the herald of that Messiah, the one whose job was to prepare the way for the Messiah. The concern of the prophets was the salvation of Israel, and through Israel, the salvation of the world. What good is it if the individual is saved but what remains is a world that tramples upon the dignity of the human person and crushes that person's hope, dreams and aspirations? We need to affirm that when the Messiah, the Christ, came into this world he brought with him the seed of a new kingdom; a kingdom that is still alive and still at work whenever the name of Jesus is on the lips of His disciples, you and me. It is a kingdom that dispels darkness, ignorance, exploitation, oppression and human slavery everywhere the good news is faithfully proclaimed. Many tyrants have tried, but no tyrant can forever suppress the Kingdom of God and no evil can forever resist its fury. No wonder John the Baptist spoke with such starkness of the wrath which was to come. The gates of hell itself cannot prevail against the Kingdom of God which came into the world with the birth of the Christ child. No wonder the angels sang in the heavens and wise men bowed in adoration. Phillip Brooks was right when he wrote of the events that occurred in the little town of

Bethlehem: “The hopes and fears of all the years are met in thee tonight.”

Advent is hope, first of all for the world. But Advent is also hope for us as individuals. Advent is hope for you and me.

In London during the Second World War, Hitler’s war planes were bombing that great city with regularity. In order to safeguard the children, trainloads of them were evacuated to the country. Somebody asked one young lad, “Where are you going?” He thought for a minute and replied, “I don’t know, but the king knows.” My brothers and sisters, you and I are in the same situation. We don’t know what the future holds, but our king knows, our God who is King of kings and Lord of lords. This is the season of the year when we are reminded that this is God’s world. God is at work in this world, and even though we may be surrounded by darkness, we know there is a light shining in the darkness that the darkness cannot overcome it. Even the prospect of death cannot dispel the believer’s sense of anticipation.

Damon Runyon once wrote a charming story about a man he called Doc Brackett. Doc Brackett was a beloved old physician whose office was open to the poor and needy. He would get up in the middle of the coldest nights and ride twenty miles to doctor to treat a sick child or to patch up someone who was hurt. Everybody in town knew Doc Brackett’s office over Rice’s clothing

store. It was up a narrow flight of stairs. A sign at the foot of the stairs said: **DR. BRACKETT, OFFICE UPSTAIRS.** Doc Brackett never married. The day he was supposed to marry he got a call to go out into the country and treat a Mexican child. His bride-to-be was so angry that she cancelled the wedding, but the parents of the Mexican child were so very grateful when their baby recovered and thrived. For forty years, the sick, the lame and the blind of that town had climbed up and down those narrow stairs to Doc Brackett's office. He never turned anyone away. Doc Brackett lived to be seventy years of age, and then one day he keeled over on the sofa in his office and died. He had one of the largest funerals ever in those parts. Everyone turned out. The town's people wanted to erect a nice tombstone for his grave but none could agree what should be engraved on the stone. The matter dragged along and nothing was done. Then one day, someone noticed that there was already a proper epitaph over Dr. Brackett's grave. The parent of the Mexican child that Doc Brackett had saved many years back had worried about him having no tombstone. They had no money to buy a marker, so they simply took the sign from the foot of the stairs at Doc Brackett's office and stuck it over his grave. Now he had a fitting epitaph. It read simply, **DR. BRACKETT, OFFICE UPSTAIRS.**

My dearest sisters and brothers in Christ, during this season of the year we pay homage to the Doc Bracketts of this world and we declare that not only is the world a better place for their efforts but now they rest in a better place as well--Dr. Brackett, Office Upstairs with the God of Hope.

So, my sisters and brother our challenge during this Advent is simply this, you and I are free to choose the attitude with which we confront life. We can believe that there is a five per cent chance of today and tomorrow or we can believe the Good News of Christmas; that God is alive and well and at work in our world bringing in a kingdom of love and justice and freedom. We can face the future with anger, fear and foreboding, or we can trust in the One who has sustained us through the years and has promised us that God will never forget us nor forsake us regardless of our situation. Get busy living or get busy dying. We can make that choice. We can choose to live in continued darkness, or we can step out into the light of hope and triumph and eternal victory. We can live for ourselves alone, or we can make the world a better place to live for all persons. Doesn't the Good News of Advent and Christmas change your attitude about life? Doesn't it make you anticipate that sometime--somewhere--somehow--something good is out there waiting to happen in your life? That is the kind of change that takes place when the Christ Child is born anew in

your heart. AMEN.