

“And So it Begins”

Dec 1, 2013

Advent I Isaiah 2: 1-5

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Out “there” the beat of Christmas preparation has begun

I know that for some of us, the beat of Christmas preparation is full of fun! Maybe a bit crazy-busy, but no less enjoyable.

For those who do not celebrate Christmas – it is impossible to escape its presence.

Out there, retailers are concerned with the bottom line of sales ---and consumers are worried about how much we can safely spend...

It feels to me that with each year the retail side of Christmas gets ramped up higher and higher with each passing year.

The stress on those with few resources must be overwhelming – the temptation to overspend and go into debt is great.

It is a season that encourages excess in all things...

From what I understand about the history of winter festivities in Europe, the emphasis on excess has always been true in one form or another: It was originally an excess in partying – drinking and eating; records show that more babies were conceived at that time of year than any other...

In the U.S. Christmas became a consumer festival in the 1950's forward.

The birth of Jesus was not always associated with the various winter festivities we now know as Christmas. The Church tried to adopt the winter festivals in the 4th century and incorporated the birth of Jesus; created the 4 weeks of Advent prior to Christmas Day with an emphasis on fasting and penitence with the hope of bringing the excess under control.

I believe we are actually moving back to Christmas being a civil holiday – a winter festival rather than a religious one. My wish would be to change the civil holiday name “Christmas” to something truly civil rather than Christian (“Christ-mass)--- and then celebrate Christmas in the church (and in our homes of course).

The Season of Advent became a part of the Protestant tradition sometime in the 20th century, and like all things Church ---Advent has evolved through the centuries, having less to do with penitence and fasting and more to do with meditation and prayer on some of the fundamentals of faith.

While Christmas and its meaning is all intermixed with lots of civil and cultural demands, expectations and traditions – in truth – this time of year is not that much different than what our lives are like most of the time.

Christmas is just regular life on steroids!

We are bombarded by commercialism every day – our calendars are busy and our families, work and creative interests make demands on us; it is often hard to keep up. I hear this from most everyone – no matter their age.

So ---what a gift the church gives us with the season of Advent where we can step away for just a bit from the cacophony of the world and take the time to pause and ponder some of the fundamentals of our spiritual life.

It is an opportunity in the darkness of winter to go inward...to look below the surface of everything we **do** to consider what it is **we value**...

We value the transformative birth of Jesus to the world and with the lighting of the Advent wreath we consider the fundamentals of **PEACE, HOPE, LOVE and JOY**.

It is a time to take stock in how the ways of Peace, Hope, Love, and Joy ---**are born in each of us**.

On this first Sunday of Advent we have lit the candle of peace.

A fundamental commitment as Christians is to walk the ways of Peace.

This morning I invite you to listen to God's dream of peace proclaimed by the Prophet Isaiah:
(Betsy)

These words were proclaimed 500 years before Jesus was even born ---and still we wait for God's dream of peace to be made real in all its fullness...

And while we wait for what God can do ----**we must participate in its unfolding**.

This morning I invite you to consider what you are willing to do to bring God's peace to fruition --- how are you/we pursuing peace in our lives and in the world around us?

Examples I have recently heard/seen: An artist from Mexico using 7,000 weapons to produce a "Gun orchestra" – truly an example of pounding our swords into ploughshares! Dear Abby letter about a couple texting their anger at one another ---surely this is not a way to communicate during conflict! – The fragile but important conversation happening with Iran around nuclear weaponry...

Around your tables I invite you to share with one another either the positive signs of peace you are participating in or see around you ---OR, ways you would like to pursue peace in your life or in the broader community.

Prayer:

Dear God, As we journey down this Advent road, grant us the courage to make peace. Peace in our hearts, peace in our homes, peace in our communities. Amen.