

INTERIM RECTOR'S ADVENT MESSAGE

My dear friends-in-Christ,

Our weekly themes for Advent this year, taken from the resource, "Feasting on the Word" will be:

The First Sunday in Advent: **Hope, expectation, preparation**

Second Sunday: **Purification, righteousness, fulfillment**

Third Sunday: **Love, peace, the presence of the Lord**

Fourth Sunday: **Justice, joy, salvation**

There is a lot happening in the world right now that everyone wishes weren't happening. And making a list of these things that we hate can be cathartic. And also, if we truly are feeling down, then that is authentically where we are situated. It would be inauthentic to force gratitude. When God became Emmanuel, God-with-us, God changed the conditions of creation permanently, for all time, for all peoples of every generation. When we confront our grief or anger or sadness -- or even when we confront depression -- we can acknowledge that God has also confronted grief and anger and sadness -- and even confronted despair and despondency and depression (if we consider Jesus' experiences in Gethsemane). And in these realities, God has given us a roadmap for how to find the goodness of God at work and the hope for redemption and salvation in whatever we are experiencing. Christians throughout the world are called to "wake from sleep" as "the day is near" (Romans 13:11-12). In his warning to the disciples, Jesus speaks of "the coming of the Son of Man," cautioning them to "keep awake, for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming." (Matt 24:36,41).

Already, it feels like our Advent journey goes against the grain of the world around us. We are reminded that Advent is a time of waiting, not knowing exactly what to expect. We long for something good. It was not to be, yet the Hebrew people of scriptures too anticipated an end to slavery, longing to be "back home" in a sense, longing to be with God again. Longing for reconciliation and freedom. Rowan Williams reminds us of the paradox expressed in metaphors of Isaiah -- desert blossoming, rain falling, a new day dawning after a long night.

St. Paul reassures us that the work we do makes a difference because of what Christ has done in the past and will do in the future. Paul writes, "Therefore, my dear brothers and sisters, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain." (I Cor, 15:58) The "work of the Lord" Paul references is what we are called to do in our families, our churches, our communities, and our vocational jobs. God has blessed his people with resources, gifts, and talents. Our job on earth is to steward and manage those resources to his glory. What is done in the here and now is still important to God. He gives us these resources so that we can fulfill his call to bring flourishing to his creation. We can still use them to the best of our ability in a way that honors God and serves the common good, furthering his kingdom in the here and now.

I have begun my journey with you as your interim priest, and it has been an interesting journey thus far. St. Cyprians Church, the cornerstone of historically black churches of our diocese, has a plethora of significant ministries, histories, and potential to offer. I have experienced personalities of grace from the chancel to the nave and beyond with the pride manifested through Lent, Easter, Pentecost, and All Saints/Souls. We now reach the dawn of Advent, mingled with my marriage and forthcoming book launch. We journey on as we soulfully prepare to worship through our Lessons and Carols on December 10, and our children and family service of St. Nicholas on Sunday December 17. Interspersed with these preparations we have an indelible role to play with the MLK Breakfast in January 2024. We shall soldier on, and we shall overcome.

Advent Blessings.

Pax et Bonum,

Noble+