

## Living in Hope

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“Candle of Hope”

Isaiah 64: 1-9

Psalm 80

Mark 13: 24-37

November 30, 2008

Advent 1 – UM

Will you join me in a moment of prayer?

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of all our hearts and minds be acceptable in your sight O God, our strength and our redeemer, amen.

I confess that when I found out that United Memorial remembered and marked the anniversary of the Halifax Explosion on the same day as the first Sunday in Advent, I was a bit stumped at how I would make connections between the two seemingly very separate themes!

However, did you notice the words of the readings?

This from Isaiah: O that you would tear open the heavens and come down, so that the mountains would quake at your presence—as when fire kindles brushwood and the fire causes water to boil— to make your name known to your adversaries, so that the nations might tremble at your presence!

Cries of lament and pleading from people who thought God had deserted and abandoned them.

And this from Mark: "But in those days, after that suffering, the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will be falling from heaven, and the powers in the heavens will be shaken."

I can imagine those same cries from people on the morning of December 6<sup>th</sup>, 1917.

Destruction and death, fires and freezing.

I am sure that some thought the world had come to an end.

But we all know that it didn't...

Out of that destruction rose a church that was stronger, more cohesive and served the community in ways that it couldn't have possibly imagined without the Explosion.

This place, this church built out of the taste of ashes and the tumbling of walls, this church's history is inextricably entwined with that of the Halifax Explosion.

And the history of Halifax is entwined with that of Boston, who gave so much help to this city in the aftermath of the explosion and subsequent blizzard.

This week marks the bus trip to Boston that has been eagerly anticipated... and for those of you who get the paper, check out the story on the religion page or at <http://thechronicleherald.ca/Religion/9009597.html>

Our history is entwined in that story of destruction... and that of hope...

And that is what this week of advent is all about... hopeful expectation... of things that are about to be... but are hard to imagine.

Do you remember the anticipation of waiting for Christmas when you were a child.

The crafts we did in school to give our parents as gifts.

The rehearsals for the school and church Christmas concerts.

The kind and loving nature that we displayed to stay on Santa's nice list and because Jesus would want us to be good boys and girls.

It seemed like Christmas would never arrive, at least to me.

We watched and we waited.

It seemed that way even though in those days, we hadn't been listening to Christmas carols in the malls since before Halloween.

In fact, I don't remember a mall when I was growing up.

We hadn't seen advertising for months already.

For our home, the anticipation of Christmas didn't officially get underway until the arrival of the catalogues from Simpsons and Eatons sometime in late November.

Actually I don't know for sure that they didn't arrive until then, perhaps my parents hid them until that time.

Wouldn't we all like to recapture the excitement, the energy and the sheer joy that is part of Christmas memories for many of us?

We talk about having too much to do.

We talk about needing to get back to the real meaning of Christmas.

We talk about wanting to get away from the materiality of the season.

But so often we say that to each other as we meet in the malls, shopping.

I think we need to ask ourselves what we are preparing for?

Are we preparing for another orgy of food, parties and gift giving?

Or are we preparing to see God again, helpless and dependent as a baby?

A God that is waiting for us to respond to that birth.

The gospel readings on this first week of advent speak about waiting and watching for God to be revealed.

The gospel reading especially tells us to be alert.

To wait...

To be tuned in, attentive, and sensitive to what is about to be revealed.

What are we hoping for this advent season?

What new births are we expecting?

Are we open to new possibilities?

As well as the death of some of our assumptions about God, can we see God's hand in the new possibilities that emerge?

I would suggest that the season of advent gives us the time and space to slow down and remember what Christmas is all about.

After all advent is 4 weeks long.

We can look at it as only 4 weeks left to do everything that we think we need to do.

Or we can look at it as an opportunity to prepare our hearts, our minds and our souls for God revealed through Jesus.

And that we have 4 wonderful weeks to do that.

As we enter a new season of advent, I invite you to join together with others or individually in a small Advent discipline of waiting and watching.

There is a wonderful book called, "Simplify & Celebrate: Embracing the Soul of Christmas.

One of the suggestions for advent in that book is this:

Consider spending between 15 and 30 minutes a day

- waiting before God by meditating on the scriptures on the renewal of hope
- watching for and listening for signs of hope in your life and in God's world that may be signs of the loving God of Advent.

- considering ways you can be signs of hope for those in despair by working for greater justice.

Stepping into Advent is like stepping into a breeze and letting hope take shape: those daring hopes about God:

**Even when our readings seem out of step with the themes of hope and waiting.**

**Mark was writing to a world in which Christians were under real threat...  
And so his hope, which is founded on Jesus Christ, moves hope to another,  
cosmic, level, and proclaims a vision in spectacular terms.**

**Underlying the message is the certainty that, although humans have been unable  
to bring about God's reign, God will act, and soon.**

**Jesus is pictured as expecting this end of the age coming very soon, but also  
calling his followers to watch and wait, without losing faith.**

**These verses have sometimes been used to explain wars or disasters, but this  
seems in total conflict with the way that Jesus lived, and what he usually taught.**

**Rather Jesus was about the ordinary things of everyday life.**

Food and drink and shelter and safety.

The realm of God... here at hand.

The hope of a world of shalom... peace and justice for all.

Those people who survived the Halifax Explosion and those who came to help knew  
about the realm of God... they knew about hope...

Their legacy lives on in the lives of many people.

Just as our faith legacy lies in prayer and hope and memory.

*"It's been said that we are an Easter people, but maybe we're really an Advent  
people, a people who wait in hope, because we know that God has not ever  
abandoned us, no matter how much we've ignored God.*

*We're an Advent people, people who wait for God's arrival, people who whistle in the dark and care for the wounded, trusting that God will show up.*

*And God does. " (Christina Berry – Midrash Posting – November 28, 2008)*

Thanks be to God. Amen.