

First Mennonite Church Edmonton

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As a child, the time between 4th Advent and Christmas Eve seemed to stretch on forever. Depending on the school year, usually we had already or were just about to wrap up classes. Everything seemed to be in place for Christmas; the tree was up, the presents were under it, carols were playing, the requisite baking was complete, and we were well into viewing the favourite Christmas specials. By this time we had also attended a variety of church Christmas programs. I was ready. And yet, I still had to wait. Waiting, as many parents know, is not necessarily a skill that all children possess. And let's be honest with ourselves, to a degree, we, as adults, don't always have the patience to wait either.

Since the beginning of Advent, we've been in a place along with many of the Old Testament prophets wondering. We've been hearing that God's going to do 'something.' We have been hanging on to the hope that 'something' is going to happen. We've been holding to the promise that 'something' is going to be done by God, and it's going to happen 'sometime.' In today's, the selected Old Testament scripture from Micah 5, we get more hints of what and where this 'something' is going to happen.

Micah 5:2-5 ² But you, O Bethlehem of Ephrathah, who are one of the little clans of Judah, from you shall come forth for me one who is to rule in Israel, whose origin is from of old, from ancient days. ³ Therefore he shall give them up until the time when she who is in labor has brought forth; then the rest of his kindred shall return to the people of Israel. ⁴ And he shall stand and feed his flock in the strength of the LORD, in the majesty of the name of the LORD his God. And they shall live secure, for now he shall be great to the ends of the earth; ⁵ and he shall be the one of peace.

Micah reminds us that, 'yes,' God is going to do something, and gives us a glimpse of what that 'something' is going to look like. It's going to look like a leader; a leader that will care and protect. A leader that will provide and bring peace. A leader that will be strong. If we were to add this prophecy to the others and stitch together all of the prophecies regarding the Messiah, just imagine what a picture that would paint. This is a prophecy that can get your imagination running, this is, to an oppressed people, good news; exciting news.

And so, naturally, the questions of an excited people are “when will this happen?”, and the answer is not nearly as exciting....soon. And so the waiting begins, for God to do this thing; for this leader to come forth; for the freedom from bondage to come. And the people wait....and wait...and wait for this thing to happen.

We have, over the course of this Advent been waiting for God to do ‘something’ too. Perhaps we’re waiting for God to appear and right the wrongs of the world. Or maybe our, your, waiting is more specific, maybe it’s wanting God to draw this languishing pandemic to an end. I know there were tears in our family yesterday as we needed to come to terms that Christmas is not going to be what we had hoped for this year, and that, again, we’re having to change plans with the changing public health guidelines. Or maybe you’re waiting for God to do something else entirely. I think, no matter what you’re waiting for, we are waiting for God to act; we’re waiting for God’s ‘something’ to happen.

God has promised that ‘something’ is going to happen, but *when, when, when* will that something happen. All that we’re left with as a hint is ‘soon,’ That’s starting to not feel a very good answer. I think of being stuck in the back seat on a particularly long car drive, calling out, “Are we there yet?!?” and getting the response, ‘soon.’ At some point that’s not going to be helpful.

It makes me feel a particular affinity to our Psalm for today. I think I particularly connect with the question, or longing of *when* God’s going to do this ‘something’? Our psalmist tries to speculate as to why God hasn’t done something yet? Why is it that God has turned away and does not look upon God’s people anymore? The Psalmists desperation is so raw. It should then come as no surprise to us that Psalm 80 is classified as a Psalm of lament. One commentary suggests that Psalm 80 is a lament psalm that borders on complaining. Their cry of ‘when’ it’s a cry both of impatience, something I think we can easily relate to, and a prayer of intercession, God do something; anything! Show us you’re there and still care! This is a psalm to be uttered in times of crisis. In their time of crisis, in their languishing, the Psalmist asks , *when, when, when.* And we, like the Psalmist are also left waiting, and wondering....*when... when will God do God’s ‘something.’*

And it’s into this waiting and wondering, this ‘when’ of advent, on 4th Advent we hear Mary’s song, the Magnificat. This is the turning point. Because Marys visit to Elizabeth this is where the question ‘when?’ receives the answer, ‘now.’ Because, it is in this ‘now’ we see that God is doing something. And it is Elizabeth who proclaims that Mary is carrying the Christ child. This

'now' becomes the culmination of our weeks of advent waiting. In her song, Mary expresses the hope, peace, joy, and love that we both celebrate and anticipate in this season. This is the 'something' we've been waiting for. After weeks of waiting for the arrival of the Messiah, after weeks of daring to imagine, Jesus' birth is imminent and we are dared to imagine once more; the face of God, appearing as a fragile, vulnerable infant.

In a few moments we will celebrate communion together. Communion is perhaps one of the most tangible ways that we encounter God. In the symbols of the bread and cup, we are intimately drawn closer to God, Jesus and the Holy Spirit. On this week we've been dared to imagine God's face, and it feels fitting to consider Communion as a time and space where God's face may feel particularly near and approachable. And so, as we prepare ourselves to meet Jesus, in the bread and the cup, may we also prepare ourselves for Christ's Advent into this world.

It is in this 'now' of fourth Advent that we see God fulfilling the longings on the prophets and of the Psalms. It is in this 'now' of fourth Advent when we can that God is doing something, and we have evidence, proof, that God is active in the world, bringing the dream that both God and God's people have held into a reality. It is in this 'now' of fourth Advent that we get to meet and see God face-to-face in Jesus. The waiting has paid off, our patience is worth it.

Amen

Sending Blessing

As we dare to imagine God's face, receive this blessing:

May God's face shine upon towards you,
and restore your spirit.

May Christ's face look towards you,
and give you peace,

May the Spirit's face surround you
and fill you with love,

Go in peace, to love and serve God.

Amen.