

Homily for the 1st Sunday in Advent

November 30-December 1, 2019

Readings: Isaiah 2:1-5; Romans 13:11-14; Matthew 24:37-44

Preacher: Virginia Fifield

Today it seems that our world is facing a crisis of spirit. We are all being held captive by uncertainty, fear of “the other,” political unrest, bigotry and confusion and we are scandalized by the abuse within the church. We are bombarded with so many voices we don’t know who to listen to anymore. There is widespread dissension, not only in our country, but globally. We are held captive by the nightly news, by the Senate hearings, mass shooting almost every week, the refugee situation, the uprisings in Hong Kong and Iraq and by the violence of words that become the norm. We have become captives of unrest and fear.

Today’s reading from Isaiah is a song that the Israelites sang during their time in captivity. It was a time of fear and uncertainty for them and the words of the song was their way of holding onto the promise of God—the promise of the end of captivity. The promise to bring all nations to himself and the promise that nations would no longer “raise sword against another, nor shall they train for war again.” Isn’t that what our deepest yearning is? We want some peace for ourselves and we want to stop being afraid.

In Paul’s letter to the Romans and in the gospel we are told to awaken from our sleep and prepare. It’s not a subtle calling, it is an urgent calling to “stay awake and prepare.” To transform our hearts.

Advent is the time to awaken from our own captivity of fear and uncertainty. A time that gives us the opportunity to make a pilgrimage to Bethlehem and the time to prepare ourselves to approach and receive the promise of God. It is a pilgrimage to the Bethlehem that is within ourselves.

We make this journey every year because we believe in the promise of God. We believe in the salvation that is the baby lying in a manger. We believe in God’s promise given to us, not with twinkling lights or fancy decorations, but with the gift of his only son. It is the fulfillment of God’s promise that will take place in a humble stable and will be announced to the lowliest by the realm of angels.

We can prepare to receive his gift by taking time for reflection. Reflection of what this promise means, not only to us, but to the world. We can take this time of Advent to awaken the deepest part of ourselves. We can take the time to prepare so we can approach the manger with humility and gratitude.

During this long journey to Bethlehem let us together prepare to “climb the Lord’s mountain, to the house of the God of Jacob that he may instruct us in his ways, and we may walk in his paths.” And let us sing in one voice, “O house of Jacob, come!”