“The Gift of Advent”

A Brief Reflection for the Advent Service and Luncheon

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Last week I received a copy of the newsletter from a congregation in Halifax that I had served earlier in my ministry. The calendar for the Advent / Christmas season included four specific dates with a notation which simply read “Advent Space.” I registered these two words in my mind as I contemplated and prepared for today’s service.

Not unlike the lead up to Holy week through the Season of Lent, we have the Advent season now upon us to prepare ourselves for the coming of Jesus. And so we have this “time out,” a Seasonal Gift,” an “Advent Space,” during which we can focus our minds on the One who comes. The person of Jesus who later became the Christ.

Yes, it is a repetitive event when an old loved story can become a new captivating story. A story of a humble birth that has been recorded in a variety of ways, from the simple account in the seven verses of the first chapter of the gospel according to Luke to the grand eloquence of the Prologue to the Gospel according to John. You have heard both these passages this morning. It is important to recognize that conjecture suggests both these accounts and others in the Gospels were written some sixty plus years after Jesus’ death. Notwithstanding, these stories have a great propensity to come alive and be current each year that we celebrate this significant birth.

This morning we have gathered together to commence the journey to Bethlehem. Our journey will be on *fast forward* given that this service has been designed to cover the entire Advent and Christmas experience in a brief time frame.

The recurring questions that are asked of us in this Advent season, this period of watching and waiting, are “How will we receive this Jesus into our lives?” “How should we prepare for his coming?” These are very personal questions to keep in mind as we move along on the journey. We are all keenly aware that much of the preparation for Advent and especially Christmas resides in the secular world and its focus on material gifts. The secular has overtaken the sacred and there is an increased need for us to restore and emphasize the significance of the coming of Jesus. Although a rather pithy phrase, we do need to bring back the Christ in Christmas.

It is fitting that Advent reminds us of the significance of the gifts we receive and celebrate at this time. I speak of the gifts of hope and joy that we have already celebrated and those of Peace and Love that we will receive in the two remaining Advent Sunday services. These four gifts in essence define the realm of God . . . not a far off place but the *here and now* of our lives. It is a realm in which we participate as followers of Jesus to build a gentler world. A world we all long for where justice, equality, acceptance, and inclusiveness lie at the heart of every nation’s character.

Somehow the Bethlehem event about a child born into a world that had no room for him still has the ability to claim our attention and our lives. In whatever way we choose to interpret the many scripture passages that relate to his coming, let us celebrate and embrace his coming again in the context of the words from the gospel according to John: “The Word became flesh and dwells among us.” God in the person of Jesus came and resides within us. Emmanuel. Let us receive and make room for him in our lives and in the collective ministry of his church here in this place.

To conclude, the Hymn writer, Christina Rossetti, pens a beautiful suggested response to Jesus’ birth in the final verse of the much loved carol “In the Bleak Midwinter:”

What can I give him, poor as I am?

If I were a shepherd, I would bring a lamb;

If I were a wise one, I would do my part;

Yet, what I can, I give him – give my heart.

As you experience these Advent days in your personal Advent Space may you sense the presence of the One who has come, is coming, and will come again. Amen.