

Advent 1

Matthew 24:36-44

As Advent begins, we live in two worlds. We're pulled in two directions. The Christmas rush and underneath the call to wait prepare and be ready for the Christ child. I feel sure we all want serenity at year's end but how do we hold the two different time experiences together? Chronology is a frantic world but we are also drawn to another world, beyond time is Kairos. The intersection of the two time scales is now. The old book of Common Prayer says that this is the time to cast away the works of darkness and put on the armour of light. Such beautiful words. **Now is when we have to meet God because we have no other time.**

So how do we set ourselves to look for the light? We're told the number of shopping days, but do we note the number of praying days? My Spiritual Director asks me 'what is happening with your prayer life?' Nothing like being put on the spot! It is a good question for all of us. When do you pray and how? Those of us who studied the book *Learning to Pray* this year, spent time looking at all of the things we do that can be classified as prayer. And that doesn't need to be quiet or still. Prayer can be doing!

So what is the real meaning of Christmas that we are preparing for here and now? God came into the world and got involved with all that human life is engaged in. Advent is the time for us to **embody that truth in the way that we live. We're invited to embody that habit of finding God in all we do in the next four weeks and beyond.** But how we do that?

There is nothing that we do that cannot be an opportunity for making connection with God. Advent encourages us to stand back and take time and reflect.

The ancient monastic teachers had a method for focusing their attention. It is preserved in the words of the Advent Antiphons

verses of scripture sung at evening from the 4th century. Words and images help to anchor our thinking. These Antiphon prayers are sung for 8 days before Christmas. The opening words are: O Wisdom, O Mighty Lord, O Root of Jesse, O King of David, O Morning Star, O King of Nations, O 'God with us. Now for the trivia buffs among you. The initial letters of the seven titles, read backwards, form a Latin acrostic, *Ero cras*, meaning 'Tomorrow I shall be there'.

So how to we build and live a bridge between such highfalutin spiritual themes and our real-world hectic Christmas preparations?

The Antiphons give us a list of the truths about God's nature:

Wisdom is one aspect. The mighty Lord of the faithful God of history will banish darkness and we need to remember that God came to the whole world.

Evelyn Underhill the great British Spiritual teacher encourages us to think about the Triune God while complete in himself can be seen in all of creation. Creator God, Loving Eternal Spirit –continues to brood over our broken world while we struggle with the pandemic, poverty and war, with racism, the effects of climate change and more as well. The loving presence broods over unformed possibilities with patient and fostering love.

Despite all of these challenges, slowly, gently, lovingly God draws not only our souls, but also those of all who are connected with us. The Spirit broods but those who are far from us as well.

Underhill sees creation as the continuing action of a personal self-sending love and the outward events of our lives can be understood in relation to that unseen Love that supports and sustains us.

We actually have our work cut out for us when we pause to look for God's invisible Spirit¹. It is hard to see the presence in the callous, greedy, earthly minded the flippant and the cocksure. We need to

¹Weigley-Carr, R. *Music of Eternity*. P23

keep in check our own arrogance and intolerance and lack of patient confident love.

We are so easily caught up and consumed by all that is turbulent, and negative, sinful and rebellious. We are called on to remember the boundless possibilities of life and power and beauty hidden in every soul. Even in those people we am tempted to dislike and neglect. At Advent we ask God to teach us reverence for all that unformed human nature on which God's Holy Spirit rests and which it can penetrate transform and make holy. God became incarnate to show us the way.

A Jan Richardson Prayer

Move over the face of
my deep,
my darkness,
my endless restless chaos,
and create,
O God;
trouble me,
comfort me,
stir me up,
and calm me
but do not cease
to breathe
your Spirit into
my awakening soul.

AMEN

We will sing the hymn O Come Emanuel based on the Advent Antiphons.

References

Lewin, A. *Come Emmanuel* Canterbury Press London 2012

Richardson, J. *Night Visions* Wanton Gospeller Press Florida 1998