Light to Overcome - I Believe in the Light

Isaiah 9:2-7; Kimby Young

John 1:1-14 December 6, 2020

There is a poem attributed to an unknown author. It is printed just below the sermon title. The origin is disputed but it most certainly arose at the end of World War 2 in relation to Jews either in hiding or being held in a concentration camp facing the horrors of ghettos, imprisonment, prejudice, occupation, relocation, death and holocaust. It is said to have been found on the wall of a cave or a cellar or a prison concentration camp. We’re not sure which origin story is true. Maybe it’s okay that we don’t know the author or the location. Maybe that makes the words even more profound, for they speak to any of our hearts in any situation. We can imagine what the author was going thru, what they had lost, what hope they were holding on to, what prayer they were lifting. The words are a statement of faith saying …

“I believe in the sun even when it is not shining;

I believe in love even when feeling it not;

I believe in God even when God is silent.”

Believing when you cannot see, when there is no proof, when reason seems to contradict; even when there is darkness, believing in the light – that is the height of faithfulness. And that is the witness of Advent. December is the darkest month of the year in our part of the world, and also the time when we add the most light to our worship and our homes. This year more than ever, we want to fill the night with light. We want to remind ourselves of the light – to believe in the sun even when it is not shining, to believe in the son of God who came as light to the world – light shining in the darkness. Now more than ever, we lift that light of Christ to remind ourselves, to remind others that the light of God’s love still shines in the world, and that the darkness cannot overcome the true light.

The season of Advent is not about denying that there is darkness in the world. Christmas cheer is not meant to say “put on a happy face” and ignore all the problems of the world or any sad feelings in your heart. In fact it is the exact opposite. God calls us to recognize the darkness and because of that darkness to shine the light of Christ. God calls us to touch despair with hope. God calls us to see all that is wrong in the world and to stand against it. Jesus didn’t come into the world because everything was perfect. Jesus came to save the lost, to heal the wounded, to lift the down trodden, and to empower the weak. Jesus came to transform the world – to shine the light of God’s love into the darkness of every corner of the world. Jesus calls us to carry on that work of shining God’s light and sharing God’s love.

So here’s the challenge of the season, and here’s why we pastors really insist on having an Advent season for four weeks before Christmas. Yes, Christmas is wonderful and I love it as much as anyone. But Advent is distinct from Christmas and is absolutely vital to our preparations for Christmas. Advent recognizes that there is a constant tug of war between light and darkness. In our lives, all of our lives, there is a constant balancing of opposites. Light and darkness. Faith and doubt. Hope and Despair. Good and Bad. Right and Wrong. We are constantly being pulled between opposites. And sometimes it’s not as clear as good versus bad. Sometimes it is past versus future, now versus then, planning or spontaneity, up or down or somewhere along the continuum. Sometimes balancing in the middle is the right thing to do. Sometimes living in two worlds at once is the only way to exist. Are you a wife or a mother – yes? Are you a father or a person who works for a living – both? Are you a student or a good athlete or a care giver or a friend – maybe all of the above. For Christians, do you belong to God or do you live in the world? We must find a way to do both – to live in this world with all its darkness, and to belong to Jesus who is light of the world. Advent reminds us that Jesus has come – the kingdom of God has already begun wholly and completely, and yet the final kingdom of God on earth is not yet fully realized. We are living in this in between time in this in between world where some of us know God and see Jesus and experience the power of the Holy Spirit, and yet others do not. We are living in this in between time in this in between world where even we ourselves sometimes know God with us so completely that we can almost taste and touch and see – the body of Christ broken for you, and at other times even we who are beloved cannot feel God’s presence. How can this be – this dual existence? This two worlds at once. Advent reminds us, God is not finished yet, but God has a plan – a perfect powerful loving and lasting purpose.

Why do we cram this huge theology into this four week season of Advent at this very busy time of the year? Exactly because this is a very busy, very important, very crazy, very emotional, very full time of the year. I don’t know about you, but there are some days this time of year that I am just exhausted. There are some days I am singing and running. There are some I am crying and missing my parents. There are some days that drag on and some that blink and are over. This time of year, I can go from zero and giggle to weeping in 30 seconds – and often over a Hallmark commercial. All the build up, all the pressure, all the anxiety over the perfect present or the perfect meal, or being the perfect person. And for us in our faith, all the overwhelming joy of realizing that God came in flesh and blood to be born in a manger to save us from our sins – it can be all too much to take in. We can all too easily miss the point or miss the day or miss the love of Jesus Christ. In fact we’ve seen it, people have lost the meaning of Christmas sometimes. You haven’t – you know – it’s about the love of God. But it’s hard to hang on to, even for us, especially on hard days, or hard years like this one.

So Advent is meant to help us prepare – to help us put it all in perspective. Advent reminds us of the bigger picture, the wider story, the plan of God, the kingdom of heaven, the work of God in the world. Advent reminds us of our part in that story, one day at a time, one beloved child of God, living in the moment, loving God and loving others the best way that we can, walking in the darkness, following the light of the world thru Jesus Christ our Savior and Lord. I believe in the son. I believe in love. I believe in God. I believe. Believe. Amen.