

It seems that every year something different happens that puts me right into the mood and motions of Advent. On the Thanksgiving right after my father died, his alarm clock near his chair went off in the darkness of the predawn as I was writing in the next room. I was startled out of my chair and turned it off. No one had set it, and all I could do was think that someone was telling me to **wake up!** Another year, the message came in the form of two small nephews and a niece. They were so excited when I walked into their house with their presents a few weeks before Christmas, **not** about the packages in my arms, but for what **they** were about to give me! Jumping up and down and standing on tiptoe as I opened it, they gifted me with these perfectly wonderful teddy bear slippers chosen especially for their aunt. When I tried to write my Advent sermon the next morning, all I could think of was those children, excited and thrilled about giving a special gift. That year God stood for me on tiptoe with shining eyes, waiting to see what we would think of our special gift to come.

This year it happened on Wednesday morning. I woke around 4:30 and realized that the electricity had gone out an hour before. My first thought was, “Oh no, I should have taken my shower last night!” And then, my mind went into overdrive. Will we have water? Will all the food in the fridge be safe? And why didn’t we learn how to use the woodstove when we had the chance? The former parsonage was on the grid with the hospital, so we may have lost power once or twice for only a few hours in nine years. In our new home, we were clearly not ready. So I got up to find the flash lights, and as soon as I found one the lights went back on. This was not a catastrophe, it was an Advent message! So then I did the most important thing first – can you guess???? I made a cup of coffee (!)...and began to prepare in earnest for the storm that was still brewing.

We could hear these things as amusing stories, an errant alarm clock going off in the dark, children dancing with excitement over a particular gift, an unexpected consequence of a storm, **or** we could look **through** them as through a **portal to an alternate reality – the life of the Spirit of God**. Forces of our society and time do not encourage that. In fact, they do all that they can to deny this alternate reality that exists just below the surface of our frantic existence. It doesn’t serve their purposes. So we are inundated with messages that attempt to hijack the power of the Spirit, such as advertisements to the tune of The Little Drummer Boy that sing “Come, they told me” to our great Door Buster Sale! And “Joy to the World,” the gingerbread mocha is back. Slake your thirst and feed your hunger with our donuts! I remember one year when a great light in the night drew all these wondering crowds looking to the skies who finally ended up in the parking light of an all night open Walmart...or was it Target?

But, you know, with the **right consciousness** even all the hype can become a portal to what **is truly going on** underneath. God can seep through anything! We **do** want something meaningful, we **are** hungry for light, we **long** for joy! But we do we want to be fooled to think that these can be found in a department store?

And so, my friends, we have **Advent**. Advent is the beginning of a whole new liturgical year in the church. The liturgical year – the seasons that we keep and the holy days we celebrate – is an invitation to the depth reality of

Spirit. The season draws us in, through story, color, sights, sounds, and smells, into the workings of God in the world and in our souls. But it cannot do so **without** our consent. We must choose to let it work on us, to focus our eyes, minds, and hearts to the promptings of the Spirit of God that lurk just beneath the surface, and just outside our gaze, waiting for us to notice. During Advent, we wait for God. And God waits for us.

But first, we must **awaken** to the fact that there is **more** going on in this world, there is more to our existence, than what we can plainly see. Advent is our **alarm clock moment**. It shakes us out of complacency, startles us out of business as usual, and sets our nerve endings on edge. We hear Paul, “You **know** what time it is, how it is the moment for you to wake from sleep...the night is gone, the day is near!” So, **wake up!** We need to wake up and out of the trance we’ve been enticed into that has us racing around in endless manufactured desires. It is time to dive down deep and own and share the God-given longings of our hearts. This is where the Spirit is working.

Second, we must **anticipate**, stand on tiptoe if need be. Now that we’re awake, and not sleepwalking to someone else’s agenda, we will see different things, have different experiences, be sensitive to signs that may have before gone unnoticed. The Spirit of God is active in and around us. Last week, Diane talked about **sightings** of the Spirit. I think it is a wonderful Advent practice. Anticipate that something new and miraculous and holy is coming into the world. The **signs are here**. As I wrote this line, I suddenly heard bells ringing somewhere in my house. Of course you could say, “Oh, that’s just her crazy husband preparing for an Advent visit,” but actually that sound sings anticipation to me, like waiting as a kid for Santa to land on the roof, gathering my sisters into my bed in the middle of the night and listening in hushed wonder...I knew we would hear the bells (and sometimes we did!). Or the ring of the doorbell right before a long-awaited loved one is due. Or the church bell ringing just before we celebrate a well-lived life, a wedding, or this holy gathering here. Something of Spirit is about to happen.

And finally, **prepare**. Well, the lights never went out again on Wednesday, but some day they will, and I want to be ready. But more than that, I want to be prepared to notice the Spirit of God, to receive it, and to allow it to become flesh in me **whenever the opportunity arises**. This preparation is the heart of Advent. We prepare for incarnation, for God to take up residence right in our own flesh and blood for birth into the world. I have always treasured Meister Eckhart’s words from the 14th century: “We are all meant to be mothers of God, for God is always needing to be born.”

The older I get, the more I realize it takes a whole community to accomplish Advent’s preparation, because it truly is a counter-cultural act. Almost an act of civil/consumer disobedience! It is the act of anticipating in the dark, sharing our longings, speaking our deepest hope, conceiving the life of God in our own, and waiting expectantly for the coming birth. Now, don’t get me wrong. I love the Christmas season, even the fun stuff! But we **need Advent** to remember what we really want and who we really are as persons filled with great capacity for Spirit, who are created to receive God’s life in our own, and give it as a gift of **hope** for the world. Amen.