

**Summerland United Church
December 8, Advent 2
The Inn: A Place at the Table**

We Open the Door

Just so you're aware, I don't create these series we do out of my own head. I use a liturgy planning company called – Worship Design Studio – run by Marcia McFee. It's from her brain and other members of her company that create and design the worship experiences we've been engaging with over the last few years. I tell you this, because part of the scripts for these services is the threshold moment – the introduction to the service I do each week, and this week's introduction is scripted as follows:

Like the childhood game of “musical chairs,” we are convinced that there are not enough places at the table. And so we shrink the guest list just in case there is not enough, and we scramble to occupy the chairs first. And yet our sacred texts invite us to imagine and make real the gathering of all people to the table, robed in the garments of a Peace that comes with justice. This is what really matters—this is the fruit of what is right and good.

This doesn't apply to us, does it? I'm not sure I've ever heard anyone suggest shrinking a guest list or seen anyone get pushing about sitting down first or getting in line for food first. If anything we worry over not having enough for everyone because we invite everyone to come join us, on a Sunday morning, or Monday supper, for cookie sales, for all the things we do. And I've witnessed our members go without to make sure our guests have enough. To the best of our ability, we always make room at the table for those in need. May we continue to do so.

Reflection

The writer of the Gospel of Luke, wants us to understand what's happening in the secular world that Jesus lives in. The writer gives clear information about the occupation and oppressive regime of the Roman Empire, giving the names and rank of emperor, governor and other rulers. The writer does this so that when we learn about the Kingdom of God, that Jesus is prophesized to bring we see how it contrasts the world as it is.

John, echoing the words of Isaiah is speaking not of the world as it is, but how it should be. How it could be, if we can separate ourselves from the consumer driven world.

This prophesy uses a number of common ancient Hebrew themes and metaphors, which we need to understand to fully embrace the prophecy. First – the wilderness.

For us, the wilderness is often a place of calm respite. Many of us enjoy 'getting away from it all' through camping and hiking or mountain biking, skiing, kayaking. The wilderness is a place for adventure and holiday's.

For those living in ancient times the wilderness was a place of danger, darkness and monsters. Metaphorically the wilderness is the unknown, confusion and fear.

The second metaphor is – crooked and straight paths. Again, for us taking the winding road is often the scenic route, the road less travelled is desirable.

This is in direct contrast to how people in ancient times saw winding roads. If you can't see around the bend in the road, you don't know what's coming. And a crooked path in the wilderness where you can't see what's ahead or where it's leading is terrifying.

Therefore, what Isaiah and John are saying here is that Emmanuel, God with Us, is coming and the unknown will become known, the shadowed places where monsters hide will lit up. Rather than walking an unknown path, with no clear direction – the path will be made straight – we'll be able to see all the way to the end, we'll know what's coming up ahead. We will be safe.

In these scripture passages we are called to begin this work, to prepare the way. We can't just sit around and wait for Emmanuel, we need to start the work, get our tools ready and begin to create the Kingdom of Heaven on Earth before Emmanuel's arrival.

And then, when Emmanuel does arrive then the radiant glory of the eternal one will be revealed and those who huddle in the night, those who sit in the shadow of death, will be able to rise and walk in the light, guided by the path of peace.

A peaceful path, a straight, smooth path where all can walk together.

So how do we do this? It feels like a pretty big ask doesn't it? We do it, by remembering that one church, one community of faith can't do it all. Rather, we do it in the ways that we can – the ways we already are.

Making space at the table is not a big ask and we are clearly capable of doing this. The record number of people at Monday Supper in November speaks to that. You may not realize that Summerland United Church has a reputation up and down the valley for its hospitality. The authentic welcome we give to anyone who walks in the doors is known.

This past week we celebrated Affordable housing coming to Summerland. We gladly had done something amazing. We've given up our space to make room for those who need housing. We've moved in here, which has been a huge change full of both grief and joy. We're learning to share space with another community of faith and who've opened their doors to us, made room in their inn for us – so we can all continue to be a house for the holy. Be a place of warm welcome and comfort.

Now we are here, more or less settled and it is time for well deserved rest after navigated our own crooked road of the unknown. We're smoothing out the roughness and taking time to be together. Here we sit, not in the shadow of night, but rather in the

soft dimness just before dawn. We know that soon the Sunrise from the heavens will break through and we will rise and walk the path of peace.

But for now, we rest. We dream, we wonder – how will continue to be a house for the holy in the days and weeks and years to come. There's no rush, we'll get there in the end. amen