

Summerland United Church
Dec 1 Advent 1
The Inn: Making Room for Hope

We Open the Threshold Door

Economic disparity runs rampant, locally and globally. As we enter the Advent season, how can our churches become houses where the Holy will be born anew—offering respite, sustenance and care, opening the doors ever wider to those seeking shelter from the onslaught of life?

No one church can do it all, but each can do something. As we study the biblical prophets that call us to care for our neighbors and “make room in the inn,” the lonely and frightened spaces within us are filled with the light of Hope, Peace, Joy, and Love.

First Reading

Jeremiah 33: 14-16 (CEB)

‘The days are surely coming,’ says YHWH, ‘when I will bestow on my children all the blessings I promised them. In those days and at that time I will raise up a righteous branch from the line of David, who will bring justice and integrity to the land. In those days Judah will be safe and Jerusalem will be secure. They will call the land, YHWH is our Justice.’

Second Reading Psalm 25: 4-5

Make your ways known to me, YHWH;
teach me your paths.

Lead me in your truth—teach it to me—
because you are the God who saves me.
I put my hope in you all day long.

Reflection

When we step aside from the hoopla of the secular Christmas shenanigans we discover that Advent is a strange liminal time of now/not yet. We’ve all experienced advent before. We’ve done the waiting, done the preparation, experienced the yearning for the promised one before. And we know the promised one has come and will come again at Christmas. The prophecy we heard from Jeremiah that a righteous branch from the line of David has been fulfilled, yet at the same time, we await – with hope – for it to be fulfilled again.

This place of tension isn't an easy place to sit in, and perhaps that's why we get distracted by the secular sparkle of Christmas. That part of the season is easy to participate in, it takes no effort at all really.

But I don't know if it feeds us in the same way that preparing for the promised one does. There's a reason we take 4 weeks to prepare for Christmas, it's not to be rushed, in fact, despite all information to the contrary, this is the time of year for us to slow down, rest, relish in the early nights of rejuvenating darkness. Take as an example the animals who hibernate.

The first Sunday in advent is always hope. Because even though we know this story has already happened, we hope for it to happen again. In ancient times as winter set in and the days grew longer and everything got colder, people would become fearful that maybe this year, despite all years to the contrary – what if? What if this time spring doesn't come? What if this time new life isn't born? What then?

So we hope. And with hope comes trust that yet again what has been, will be again. The Christ Child has been born and will be born anew at Christmas. So in the pregnant time of waiting and for God's love to be born again in the world we hope.

And we prepare. We know this God's love will be born in the world and that we will be witness to this birth and we will also become, the mysterious way of spirit, God's love in the world. God's love in the form of Jesus will walk the earth – through us, as us, because we are called to be the body of Christ in the world. The hands and feet of God's love in the world.

So, how then can we, our church, house the Holy when it is born? How do we offer respite, sustenance and care, and open our doors ever wider to those seeking shelter from the onslaught of life?

We already do this in numerous ways and advent is a time of pregnant possibility, a time to dream and wonder and hope. A time when we can be curious about who we are as a community of faith. In our nativity story we hear that with Mary and Joseph arrive in Bethlehem there's no room for them in the inn, yet the innkeeper doesn't turn them away exactly, rather the innkeeper thinks creativity and finds an opportunity that works for what's needed.

Throughout advent we are carrying God's Love within us – what will it look like when it is born at Christmas? So the invitation for this Advent season is to wonder and dream and think creativity about who we are as innkeepers. In what ways are we, Summerland United Church, sharing space with St. Stephen Anglican Church, uniquely suited to house the holy?