



"Raise your voice... raise it; don't be afraid!" - Isaiah 40:9

The history of humanity is fraught with pain—especially the pain that comes accompanied by fear and leads to oppression and violence of one people against another. This is the world into which Jesus was born and through which his teachings would challenge and call for transformation. The opening words of an anonymous Jewish poet, “I believe in the sun, even when the sun is not shining,” were scrawled on a wall during the Holocaust. This theme song for our season calls us to examine our penchant for annihilating fear by annihilating each other. The power of narrative and music will call us to a different response—transformation and reconciliation through hope, love, joy, and peace. This Advent and Christmas, let us fill the night with music and light and affirm and act on the reasons why we can still “believe, even when” we are discouraged.

Advent 1

"I Believe in the Sun: Hope for Tomorrow"

"Prepare the way..."

"Change your hearts and lives, and trust this good news."

"Raise your voice... raise it; don't be afraid"

(Mark 1: 1-15 and Isaiah 40: 1-11)

This Advent, we are looking to hear some comfort, some challenge and some good news. The prophet Isaiah and the four Gospel authors were writing in a time when people needed desperately to hear all of these as well. This first week, Isaiah and the gospel writer who published first—Mark—reassure the people that good news is beginning and yet they both say, “make yourself ready!” Raise your voices, change your hearts, get ready to be transformed, because now is the time. Have hope that we can do what needs to be done to bring more light into the world.

Advent 2

“I Believe in Love: Daring Right Relationship”

*“Look! A virgin will become pregnant and give birth to a son,
And they will call him, Emmanuel (“God with us”).”
(Mathew 1: 23 and Isaiah 7: 14)*

In both the Gospel of Matthew and Isaiah, a messenger appears as a sign from God, heralding a new era. In each passage, the words “do not be afraid” appear... offering a clue that the messenger—whether prophet or angel—was referencing something that induced fear in the recipient. A new way of being, of relating and loving takes courage—eschewing the present order of things so that a new and better day can be born.

Advent 3

“I Believe in God: Ode to Joy”

*“He has pulled the powerful down from their thrones
and lifted up the lowly.”
“I live on high, in holiness,
and also with the crushed and the lowly,
reviving the spirit of the lowly,
reviving the heart of those who have been crushed.”
(Luke 1: 52 and Isaiah 57: 15b)*

This week we turn to Luke’s writing which is an account in two acts: the Gospel biography of Jesus and then the story of the early church—the “Jesus community.” Whether you were a Jew or Gentile in those days, deciding to become a part of this illegal early Christian movement could bring punishment for your allegiance. Surely the message in both Luke and Isaiah that the downcast, lowly, and oppressed would rise up is a welcome and inspirational account. Like the Jewish exiled people of Isaiah’s time and the early Christians, we also sometimes wonder where God is in our suffering. We long to hear the promise that a reason for joyful praise is the good news on the way!

Advent 4

“I Believe in the Light: Illuminating Peace”

*“What came into being through the Word was life,
and the life was the light for all people.”
“A child is born to us, a son is given to us,
and authority will be on his shoulders.
He will be named
Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God,
Eternal Father, Prince of Peace.”
(John 1: 3-4 and Isaiah 9: 6)*

The “great light” prophesied by Isaiah in today’s text is echoed in the first strains of John’s Gospel good news: the light that brings peace—that saves the people from all that would extinguish it—has been there from the beginning. The Word is made flesh and dwells among us. This reign is now... will we believe it? Will we continue to put flesh on it, embodying the peace meant for all humanity?

Christmas Eve **“We Believe, Even Now”**

“Suddenly a great assembly of the heavenly forces was with the angel praising God. They said, “Glory to God in heaven, and on earth peace...”

*“How beautiful upon the mountains
are the feet of a messenger
who proclaims peace,
who brings good news...”*
(Luke 2: 13-14 and Isaiah 52: 7)

Luke’s account is the narrative we return to again and again on this holy night, for this author gives us the most beloved detail. We yearn to see the scene play out, to hear the music of the angels, to feel the rush to the manger to see what this star that pierces the night sky has come to proclaim. We so desire to believe the Good News of the messengers that is the culmination of humanity’s pain of birth: “don’t be afraid” for unto us a sign has come that will be to all people... “on earth, peace.”

Sunday After Christmas **“Believe This: The Time has Come”**

*“You prepared this salvation in the presence of all peoples.
It’s a light for revelation to the Gentiles
and a glory for your people Israel.”*

*“For Zion’s sake I won’t keep silent,
and for Jerusalem’s sake I won’t sit still
until her righteousness shines out like a light,
and her salvation blazes like a torch.”*
(Luke 2: 31-32 and Isaiah 62: 1)

The Good News that we have proclaimed for this Advent/Christmas season ends with a second chapter of Luke that starts, “When the time came...” Indeed, the time has come for us to move from the narrative of birthing to the narrative of redemption. The story of Jesus’ ritual cleansing as a child contains stories of people who had been waiting for this moment. But the time of waiting is over—for us too. Like Isaiah who says, “for Zion’s sake I won’t stay silent, and for Jerusalem’s sake I won’t sit still,” we will not stop our songs of resistance until justice shines out like a light for all.