

Waiting and Wondering

Evan Smith

Community Builder

Bloor Street United Church – Third Sunday of Advent

December 11, 2011

Reading: Isaiah 61:1-4, 8-11

The spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me,
because the LORD has anointed me;
he has sent me to bring good news to the oppressed,
to bind up the broken-hearted,
to proclaim liberty to the captives,
and release to the prisoners;
to proclaim the year of the LORD's favour,
and the day of vengeance of our God;
to comfort all who mourn;
to provide for those who mourn in Zion—
to give them a garland instead of ashes,
the oil of gladness instead of mourning,
the mantle of praise instead of a faint spirit.
They will be called oaks of righteousness,
the planting of the LORD, to display his glory.
They shall build up the ancient ruins,
they shall raise up the former devastations;
they shall repair the ruined cities,
the devastations of many generations.

For I the LORD love justice,
I hate robbery and wrongdoing;
I will faithfully give them their recompense,
and I will make an everlasting covenant with them.
Their descendants shall be known among the nations,
and their offspring among the peoples;
all who see them shall acknowledge
that they are a people whom the LORD has blessed.

I will greatly rejoice in the LORD,
my whole being shall exult in my God;
for he has clothed me with the garments of salvation,
he has covered me with the robe of righteousness,
as a bridegroom decks himself with a garland,
and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels.
For as the earth brings forth its shoots,
and as a garden causes what is sown in it to spring up,
so the Lord GOD will cause righteousness and praise
to spring up before all the nations.

In a world that is centred around self-gratification
What does it mean to wait and prepare?

In the midst of 24 hour Wal-mart signs,
party preparations,
and wrapping presents,
where do we find the time to slow down?

When the whole world treats Christmas as an ending,
how do we mark and honour it as the beginning?

As Christians we mark time differently.
Christmas is not simply a celebration of the year that has just passed,
but it marks the birth of the one who would come to show us how to live
in community, with right relations between each other.

The first Christmas was built on waiting.
Mary's advent was nine months of waiting for what was to come.
There's no doubt that Mary was scared.
She was an unwed mother,
She was homeless.
Mary and Joseph were forced to look for shelter while traveling
to meet the heavy taxation demands of a colonial government.

Mary lived in a land recovering from violent civil wars and still in turmoil.
Like half of all mothers who deliver today, she gave birth in Asia.
Her son became a refugee in Africa.

This is not the story that is portrayed in children's books and nativity scenes.
This is a tale of stress, of hardship, and of resilience.
It is a story of waiting in the midst of difficulty.

Mary must have done a lot of wondering—
What would Joseph think when he found out she was pregnant?
What would happen if she went into labour before they reached Bethlehem?
How were people going to treat her as a young unwed Mother?
Yet Mary had faith in the God of love.
She bravely answered the call of the angel
and waited patiently to give birth to the Son of God.

If you have had children, you know the waiting that comes along with it—
waiting for a positive pregnancy test,
waiting for adoption papers to be signed,
sitting morning after morning in the waiting room of a fertility clinic.

And then there's the wondering—
What will this baby grow up to be?
What if I'm not ready to care for this child?
Will I ever sleep again?

But that's the thing about preparation, about advent.
It is a time of waiting and wondering that is not simple.
It is not that we are promised a period of joy, hope, peace, and love
where everything is easy and in harmony
but we are called as God's people to create
joy, hope, peace, and love
in our own lives,
and the lives of those around us.

We are called as Christians to step outside the hecticness of commercial Christmas
and to prepare for the birth of Jesus.

We are called to embody Mary's bravery
and move through this period of franticness and chaos
with a peace in our hearts knowing that something big is on its way.
Something better than that which can be purchased in the stores.

We are preparing for the birth of Jesus,
who will demonstrate an unconditional love from our creator.
who will lead us out of darkness and into the light.

And yet, much like Mary,
the promise of our saviour does not come easily.
It doesn't change the things happening in our lives.
But it gives us hope,
like that of a new Mother.
Imagine Mary sitting beside Joseph in that stable
with a small baby in her hands,
kissing his cheeks and whispering his name.... "Jesus".

Like Mary, we don't know what the future holds.
We don't know how our lives might change,
whose presence will grace our lives,
or what small thing will have the greatest impact.

But we hold onto a faith,
knowing that there is something larger than us out there
who walks where we walk,
who feels our pain
and shares our joy.

Like Mary when she first said:
"My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour,"
may we accept the challenge in the midst of our difficulties
to share and reflect the purpose of advent.
May we seek peace, honour hope, spread love and express joy
to all those around us.

And may we wait and wonder
in active anticipation for what the next part of our lives will bring.
In much the same way that Mary did
when she sat and held her baby
and celebrated on that first Christmas morn.