



December 6, 2020
Second Sunday of Advent
The Rev. Chip Dischinger, Deacon

Readings: Isaiah 40:1-11, 2 Peter 3:8-15a
Psalm: 85:1-2, 8-13
Gospel: Mark 1:1-8

Fall afternoons were lovely and exciting for me, growing up.

I played soccer regularly. And one of the most exciting things and the most satisfying things was the pre-game portion. We would warm up. We would assemble as a team and talk to coaches and interact between players to kind of get the temperature, find out how everyone was doing. It was a very steady and important time.

It was a time of anticipation. Everyone was excited, prepared, waiting. And this was waiting not only for us, as players, but also for the spectators, the community that was watching...anticipating something that was hopefully going to be exciting.

Now on the darker side, of course, with the hopeful anticipation, there was also a darker side which included the concern of injury. I had seen players who had gotten hurt. Injury was always a possibility when playing at a high pitch.

Failure. We had set very certain goals and were excited about achieving and doing well. But failure was always a possibility, as well.

And loss — loss is when something that is hoped for is never got or is taken away. And that was a possibility, as well.

And something that will always stick with me was, as a college player, after we finished stretching and warming up, we would gather in a circle and prayers would be offered. There were prayers that were said in Portuguese and in Hebrew and in a Nigerian dialect and in Spanish and English. It was wonderful mixture, a stew of prayers and hopes and concerns being offered.

Advent is more than waiting. Advent is more than waiting...it is also change.

Verse three of Hymn 56, *O Come, O Come, Emmanuel*, goes like this:

*Oh, come thou Branch of Jesse's tree
Free them from Satan's tyranny
That trust thy mighty power to save,
And give them victory o're the grave.*

Satan's tyranny, as I understand it, seeks separation...separation from God.

It may seem that God is withdrawn. The pain and fear and loss enter all these feelings. And doubt may enter into our lives, and into our picture, and into our very souls.

I believe that it's important at times like this to understand, to live with the doubt, examine the doubt and embrace God's place in the doubt...embrace God being present even in situations of doubt.

And certainly in these times of loss, of fear, of uncertainty, of misinformation, understanding what this doubt is and sharing it with God is critical to making through and becoming whole....sharing doubt with God and let the rest go. Let the unimportant things go.

It is important to seek God's healing power to change. And this healing power is manifest powerfully in Jesus.

This 2020 Advent is more than waiting. It is recreating newness. This is a term that I call "renewness": it's a station in life where newness is, and where we're regenerating that. Renewance. Renew our loving and truthful relationship with God.

How do we do this? By continuing in worship and communion...through study, prayer, fellowship.

And these are things that, since we cannot meet collectively and some of our connections aren't as precise and as active as they once were, we still have options and opportunities to worship and connect in these ways.

And this can lead us as a basis to living into the Gospel of Jesus Christ...which tells us to serve others by loving our neighbor, striving for justice and peace among all people, and respecting the dignity of every human being.

Dr. William J. Barber who is an ordained minister in Goldsboro, North Carolina, is head of the Poor People's Campaign. He has, for the past several years, led efforts in North Carolina, as well as in Washington, DC, on behalf of healthcare and race relations and some very important things that, I believe, are coming to the fore in this very difficult time.

He says in addition to serving others and loving neighbors, we must act as a moral defibrillator to shock the world with love. Barber says to shock the world with mercy.

From Hymn 67:

*Comfort those who sit in darkness.
Mourning 'neath their sorrows' load.
Speak ye to Jerusalem
Of the peace that waits for them.
Tell her that her sins I cover
And her warfare now is over.*

Advent is more than waiting. It is restoring.

We share the glory of the Lord, coming in the birth of our Savior, Jesus Christ, with this deeply wounded world. God's healing and restoring power waits for the world and waits for you.

The world is waiting for you.

AMEN