

Something to Cling To ~ September 28, 2010
Isaiah 2:1-5; Romans 13: 11-14; Matthew 24: 36-44; Psalm 122

As most of you know, I traveled to Wisconsin this past week to spend Thanksgiving with my daughters and their families. I carry many hopes with me as I fly from here to there. I hope for decent weather, for a pass on the body scanning machines at the airports, and for a holiday that is relatively stress free.

I never expect these things, I just hope for them. I have found when I rigidly expect one result or another, like non-lumpy gravy, something always goes wrong and I end up disappointed. Hoping instead of expecting is a far gentler thing for all concerned.

All of my hopes were realized on this trip. Although the weather was chilly, and the headwind was 100 knots against the nose of the plane going to Wisconsin, we flew in the moon and starlight. The trip going took about 2 and one half hours, while the return trip took an hour and a half, the tail wind must have been mighty. The plane is a small 50 seater and it tends to move with the wind.

Thanksgiving was wonderful—there were four women in a tiny kitchen and no one snapped at anyone. The Tofurky even appeared to turn out well—however, you could not prove this by me.

Airport security was not as daunting as news reports would have us think. It seemed normal. Every now and then someone would be pulled aside for a scan or a pat down, but it seemed to be a rarity. When I had gotten through the lines and I went to sit down and put my shoes on, I saw a large sign which said, “Recombobulation Area.” I started laughing. Fortunately, I did not feel very discombobulated at the time. It was a delight to know that someone has a good sense of humor and that some of us actually understood the sign as we tied on our shoes and put on our belts and jingled change and keys back into our pockets. My hopes for this process were realized.

My hopes are very small ones compared to the hope the nation Israel gleaned from the words of the prophet Isaiah. This reading comes along during the Advent season reminding us, that, no matter how dark our former days may have been, there is the promise of a brighter future. Israel would eventually move out of days and nights of disobedience and anger toward God and would find places of peace and new understanding. God would sustain the nation of God’s chosen people and eventually they would see the right way of living and moving and having their being. Of course, this did not happen quickly, but it gave those who had ears a chance to hope. God through Isaiah gave the people something to cling to.

Often, we Christians, take these prophecies as a sign that Christ is coming. They were not written with any specific person in mind. They were written to give the people hope that a messiah would arise and lead them from the wilderness of their souls. Many still wait for this to happen.

Paul’s words to the Romans echo the words of the prophets in the Hebrew Scriptures. He urged those who read this letter to lead decent lives as they waited for the return of Jesus. They were to focus on what was good and true and set aside a wide variety of immoral acts. They were to gain a spiritual focus for the time was coming when they

would be saved from this world. Paul gave the people in those early little churches hope, something to cling to when the days were dark and dreary.

And, then, in Matthew, Jesus reminds those who followed him that the time was coming when they would enter God's kingdom. He told them to be ready, to watch and to wait and to make their lives all they could be. They were to become the very best humans possible. They were to love and forgive one another, find joy in life and share the hope that they would be sustained until the end would come.

Advent is the season of waiting and watching and preparing for the light to come into the world in the person of Jesus. It has become, for most of us, a hectic time of year. One that sees us scrambling to find the right gift for those we love, decorating our houses to reflect the season, and just feeling worn out by the time Christmas rolls around.

We are surrounded by news that is not at all good about the economy, about the possibility of yet another war, about death and taxes. We lose sight of the light that is promised to lead us from times of doubt and despair into a better world. We look outside of ourselves for some beacon of hope. Perhaps, we are looking in the wrong place. Maybe we need to look within and discover the light that is there. That precious light we are called to share with those around us. The light represented by our first Advent candle that reminds us of the hope, we as God's people, should have—a light that needs to be fanned into something stronger and brighter. A light that will serve as a beacon to others.

As I was writing this I thought of that hymn, "Lead, Kindly Light." "Lead, Kindly light, amid the encircling gloom, lead thou me on. The night is dark and I am far from home; Lead thou me on. Keep thou my feet; I do not ask to see the distant scene; one step enough for me."

We are called to consider and follow the light that Jesus brought to the world through his life and teachings. And, we are also called to let our lights shine so that we can find our way, together, through any encircling gloom we may encounter. Together we can find hope for our future. We may stumble and fall but there is always a pathway that can be illuminated by joining our lights and hopes together. As the nation Israel learned and, as the followers of Jesus have known all along, "The people who have walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who lived in a land of deep darkness—on them light has shined." The light of hope and promise still shines on us, within us and through us.

Amen