

Weekly Devotions
South Holburn Church
1st December 2020

READINGS

I love traditions! I remember reading when Joe and I first got married about the importance of starting our own family traditions. So, we began by getting a new ornament every year for the tree and now each of our children have a whole set of ornaments that belong to them. We also followed many of my family's tradition. We always went out for a meal on Christmas Eve and attended worship afterwards. We have instituted other traditions like singing "Happy Birthday to Jesus" and having a Christmas party every year with friends. Some of our traditions have had to change due to various circumstances and it can be hard to change your routine. For as wonderful as a tradition is for meaning and memory, it sometimes gets in the way of us learning something new. I used to love the tradition of decorating our tree on Christmas eve as a child; it was so exciting to wait for it and enjoy it that day! However, when we had children Joe and I began to decorate on the first weekend of Advent and that has been even more enjoyable! What are some of your favorite traditions? Have there been any that have changed over the years for the better?

This year Christmas will be different. We won't be able to gather with our families and friends in the same way we usually do. We may miss the crowds at the tree lighting or the hustle and bustle of shopping in the city centre. However, we can be certain that our God has not changed and that he is the Alpha and the Omega. He has the final word on all that is happening around us.

⁶He said to me: "It is done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End. To the thirsty I will give water without cost from the spring of the water of life. ⁷Those who are victorious will inherit all this, and I will be their God and they will be my children.

Revelation 21:6-7

"Look, I am coming soon! My reward is with me, and I will give to each person according to what they have done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End.

Revelation 22:12-13

REFLECTION

Advent is traditionally a time of preparation. We prepare our hearts to welcome anew Jesus as the babe in the manger and the one who has come as Savior of the world. Yet it is also a time to remember that Jesus is the beginning and the end. He has come, God in human flesh; and will come again, to put all things right. I sometimes lose that perspective. It is easy to remember Jesus as a baby come to bring me new life but I am less comfortable with the discussion of Jesus and his second coming.

David preached about this topic in his sermon on Sunday and I was reminded that I am not alone in my discomfort. Many of us avoid talking about Jesus' second coming because we just do not know what to do with it. For me I have perhaps spent too much time worrying about Christmas traditions of baking Christmas sweets, buying gifts for the family and even become too busy with the things of ministry to really consider what it means that we are awaiting Jesus 2nd coming!

What a beautiful day it will be when Jesus comes again! Tradition will be turned upside down and all that will matter will be Jesus' love and forgiveness. He comes to bring us new life and to give us new beginnings.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, a German theologian who resisted the Nazi regime and ended up dying in a death camp has much to say about new ways of seeing Christmas.

"...And then, just when everything is bearing down on us to such an extent that we can scarcely withstand it, the Christmas message comes to tell us that all our ideas are wrong, and that what we take to be evil and dark is really good and light because it comes from God. Our eyes are at fault, that is all. God is in the manger, wealth in poverty, light in darkness, succor in abandonment. No evil can befall us; whatever men may do to us, they cannot but serve the God who is secretly revealed as love and rules the world and our lives."

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, God is in the Manger: Reflections on Advent and Christmas

Traditions are no longer important when one is struggling to survive. When we see Christmas at a new perspective, we realize that though we suffer we serve one who came among those who were suffering. We serve a risen Lord who was born into poverty and filth. Our God did not take the easy way out but shook up all the traditions and religious leaders so that God's kingdom might prevail not simply "tradition".

Some of us have faced the dreaded disease of Covid, others have family and loved ones who have succumbed to it or been inflicted by it and are still healing. Death and disease sober us quickly to what really matters. It is not the trappings of Christmas or even the traditions that we love so dearly, it is rather the truth of Christmas that will prevail.

Our God, Emmanuel is God with us! We can find Jesus and his story in new traditions that carry the same meaning. I hope and pray you will join us for some new traditions this year-the Advent quiz this week and for the Christmas cuppa on the 13th. Even though these events are on Zoom they will still be a laugh and will also provide us with time to sing the carols we love so much and share in Christian fellowship, which is the balm to our hurting souls. Our challenge is to find new traditions and new ways of telling this beautiful

story that comes to us of old and never changes! I look forward to hearing about your favorite old traditions and some that you are discovering that are new!

With love,

Julia

PRAYER

Come, O Come Emmanuel,
God with us,
God for us,
God in us.

We are grateful for this season of preparation.

Remind us that your coming again is real.

We will one day see you and face to face!

What a beautiful day that will be!

Help us not to run from that truth but to embrace it.

We are often too consumed with the trappings of the season
to really consider the true meaning of preparing for your coming.

Help us to release our old habits and traditions,

Help us to trust you that there is good in store for us even when it feels the sun does not
shine for many days.

You will give us a new song to sing of your love and forgiveness and of a life that came to
be poured out for many.

Give us new opportunities to share your love and light with the world this week.

Give us an appreciation of the pain in this world and how you can bring healing to those
who are hurting most.

Give us the ability to be your hands and feet sharing your love on dark days and bringing
your light into the darkest crevices of life.

Bring us together in love, in unity and in fellowship,

that we might share your old story in new ways with our world.

In Jesus name we pray,

Amen.

