

Advent Two
December 7, 2014
Barrhaven United Church

Isaiah 40: 1-11

[Mark 1: 1-8]

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Hope and Peace

Last Sunday we began a new year in the church. We turned a page in the church calendar, in the liturgical year. Liturgy means the work of the people. Each year is a fresh start. Every year we turn to our work, our work of the spiritual life, again. We turn the page, we begin again, another chance to deepen our spiritual lives.

Matthew Fox, using the work of 13th century German mystic, Meister Eckhart, describes four spiritual paths that make up the religious life. The first, the *via positiva*, the positive way, is the way of addition. It is the path we travel through Advent and Epiphany. What does it mean to walk the way of addition? the positive way?

Advent means coming, or expected, anticipated arrival. So the first weeks in each new church year we anticipate the coming of Christ into our lives and our world and we prepare for it. Advent is a time of preparation. We have to get ready to receive Christ/God into our lives again. We have to be prepared spiritually to receive Christ, to notice God at work in our lives and our world.

The spiritual gifts and practises of Advent form the foundation of our house of faith. They are the most basic gifts of the spiritual life and upon them all others depend. Hope and peace are the first two gifts of the new year. We lit the candle of hope last week and the candle of peace today. They are the foundation of our spiritual house our house of faith, of our spiritual lives. Upon them, all the others rest.

We hear a lot about hope. There are “hopeful signs” that the spread of ebola is slowing down, the coalition has slowed the momentum of ISIS, positive indicators that western economies will reach pre 2008 levels next year. This hope is generated by something external, by external circumstances. It’s not the hope I’m talking about. The reduction of anxiety is not Christian hope.

The hope of Advent isn’t based on and doesn’t require good things happening. Advent hope is the conviction that God continues to be active with us in the creation of the world. God does not give up on the world, no matter how bad things get. God is always present with us and continuously luring the world in every nano-second of existence to become the best, most beautiful and harmonious world that it can become. That is the message of Isaiah in our

scripture this morning. While he and his people live in exile, he is convinced that redemption is coming and he speaks of its advent in poetic beauty.

For us, hope is both gift and task. While it's freely and abundantly available, we have to work at it - practice seeing with spiritual eyes - to fully experience it. The more we practice the spiritual discipline of hope, the more we will experience it in ourselves and the world around us. The hope we talk about exists before the events, and in spite of events. In fact, our hope helps call good events into being.

Today, the second Sunday of Advent, we light the candle of peace, calling the peace of God into our lives and our world. The candle of peace is symbolic of the power of persuasive love. Peace is the vision of God's inclusive, compassionate reign, of God's shalom, a paradise of abundance, beauty and goodness. That vision helps us see what God desires for us and the world.

To live a life of peace means to renounce coercion and control. It means to look for occasions where persuasive love can make a difference. It means to practice persuasive love in our homes our workplaces our church. To practice peace means working to bring God's realm of abundance and justice into every part of our life and our world.

Control and coercion, even in its most benign hierarchical forms, is so much an accepted part of life that we think it's a given. Yet the witness of the Christ communities is that the actuality of existence is relationality, cooperation and inclusion. We need each other. We need the other creatures with whom we share the planet. A Finnish saying my professor quoted often, speaks to this: *the power of the cow is in the grass*. Without the other, we are not who we are and cannot be whom we can become. Advent peace is living the positive path of mutuality, relationality and the persuasive power of love.

Hope and Peace - the first gifts of Advent, the foundation stones of our spiritual house of faith and the first steps of our journey along the *via positiva*. Amen

Sources: Matthew Fox, *Original Blessing: A Primer in Creation Spirituality*. 1983, Bear and Company.
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c. 2014, Suzanne E. Sykes