

A Christmas Carol

Thank you Judy for your message.

As I'm sure you all have picked up on, today is the First Sunday of Advent.

Advent, the beginning of the church year. Advent, the preparation for the birth of our Savior. When I spoke to you this summer, I talked about past events and how we had learned things from them. This morning, we will learn of the hidden meaning of things we may see and hear. Today's scripture readings are all about signs, and symbols, and promises already made. Our Call to Worship from Jeremiah tells us that "The days are coming". It is warning us that there are signs we should be looking for in the life, death, and resurrection of Christ. Of how the end of the world will not happen until all of these signs have been fulfilled. We continued with Luke and his words telling us to look for signs and symbols not just of the birth of Christ but of his birth, death, and resurrection. Advent is the beginning of the story, but the story definitely goes on.

I'm going to digress for a few minutes now. A few months ago at the board meeting, Jim J. mentioned that we have a tendency to know surface things about each other but that we seldom talk on a level where we really get to know in depth about people. I'm going to give you a few secrets not so much about

myself as much as my husband, Carl. Now, I'm a very math and science person with a sprinkling of music and Carl is a history and arts person. We both love to read but I choose romance and mystery and he chooses classic literature and science fiction. What you may not know is that Carl is extremely dyslexic. We have many times joked that I earned half of his college degree as many date nights were spent with my reading out loud from his history books since being dyslexic made it really difficult for him to read quickly and cover all the material that was assigned and also it is very hard to acquire a history minor if you keep mixing up the numbers in dates. In return, he helped me find the symbolism in the required reading that was assigned to me. I simply refused to read a book with the thought of its symbolism. To me, a story was a story and symbolism was something a teacher made up to make it more than it was. To him, he reads a book with an eye to symbolism. To this day, I struggle with symbolism and he struggles with dyslexia.

What does this have to do with Advent you may be asking. Well, one of Carl's favorite authors is Charles Dickens. I'm not sure if he loved Dickens first or if he was drawn to his books after being introduced to Thomas Nast who illustrated during the time of Oliver Twist and a Christmas Carol. If there is a rendition of A

Christmas Carol I believe we have seen it. Plays, movies, cartoons, and even just this week one of my favorite soap operas, The Young and the Restless, did a spin off of A Christmas Carol. To me, this is a lovely story of Christmas past, present, and future. To those who see symbolism in literature it is the story of greed, family love, and forgiveness. Or maybe greed, wealth, and sharing.

Luke is preparing us to look for things that will give us insight on things to come. Advent is probably one of our most symbolic seasons as it is the beginning. We have our Advent candles that each stand for a virtue. Today's is hope. It will be followed by love, joy, and peace. We have the Christmas tree that represents forever. The name evergreen gives you a hint of what it symbolizes even without the decorations. You can decorate an oak tree but that doesn't make it a Christmas tree. Even the simple candy cane is symbolic with the shape being that of a shepherd's staff, red color representing the blood of Christ and white purity. The nativity scene here next to me can be a story all in itself. When doing our Advent decorating last Sunday, we discussed what representation we wanted to make. Was it the entire story today, or did we want to bring out pieces as the story transpired. Should the Christ child wait until Christmas Eve as well as the 3 wise men and the camel until Epiphany? Did we want it front and center as we have it or should we put it in the back where there was more room to spread it

out. We learned that several people hadn't noticed it the last two years when it had been in the back. Neither is wrong. It is just a different perspective, a different symbol if you will. One is up front and in your face, the other a quiet reflection of things to come.

As we move through the Advent season, and indeed the entire church year, let us remember the words of Luke and continue looking for the signs and symbols of things to come, of opportunities to serve, of Christ's love among us. No matter how difficult it might be for some and how well we know the story for others, may we be one in our journey.

In Christ' name.

Amen