

Chuck Blaisdell, Senior Pastor  
First Christian Church  
Colorado Springs, Colorado  
December 1, 2013 First Sunday in Advent  
©2013

## **Anticipate: Hope**

Isaiah 2:1-5 NRSV The word that Isaiah son of Amoz saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem. In days to come the mountain of the Lord's house shall be established as the highest of the mountains, and shall be raised above the hills; all the nations shall stream to it. Many peoples shall come and say, "Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob; that he may teach us his ways and that we may walk in his paths." For out of Zion shall go forth instruction, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem. He shall judge between the nations, and shall arbitrate for many peoples; they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more. O house of Jacob, come, let us walk in the light of the Lord.

As many of you know, once a year my long-time friend and fellow pastor Bob Hill and I do a several day road trip together, usually through the desert southwest, on which we conduct what amounts to our own continuing-education-seminar on wheels. It is always an enjoyable time and I always come away from those trips together refreshed and having learned things. I am our designated travel agent for these annual excursions and I enjoy planning those trips, trying to maximize our hotel points and find a routing for us that is doable and interesting. When we've decided on a date and a general locale, then I start the planning. Suppose, say, we're going to meet up in Phoenix and drive first to Albuquerque. So, I want to find out what our options are for travel and what are the more interesting ways to drive than just via the interstate. So what do I do? I go to Google Maps, I put in Phoenix as the origin and Albuquerque as the destination and click. Within *milliseconds* I am presented with several routings.

I was thinking the other day about how different that sort of trip planning is from

the way I used to do it with paper maps and AAA Guidebooks and brochures. For you see, I come by this love of travel and travel-planning honestly. When my brothers and I were children, our family made several long car trips from Texas to Maine and to Florida where our relatives were. And even then, I enjoyed helping to plan our trips. But it was different. Back then, a couple of months before that vacation, my father would order a packet of maps and suggested routings from the Gulf Oil Company, where, in that pre-computer age, an actual human being assembled the correct maps and by hand with a highlighter drew a route on those maps. I can remember like it was yesterday that summer day when the postman would finally deposit the fat manilla envelope postmarked from the Gulf Oil Company in our mailbox in the morning. I had been waiting weeks for those maps so I could pore over them. But I didn't tear into that fat envelope of maps right then (even though my dad had said I could). No, I carefully would put it on the kitchen table, look longingly at it all morning, eat my lunch, do my chores, and then finally, finally in mid-afternoon I would allow myself almost reverently to tear open that envelope of maps and unfold them and only then to begin imagining routes to suggest to my father.

Now, I ask you: what is the difference between my Google maps internet trip planning, and the experience with the long-ago packet of maps from the Gulf Oil Company. One word, one little word – but I'll let Carly Simon sing to you about what that word is: (Click HERE: <http://tinyurl.com/puwu7cc> )

Anticipation. Anticipation. That is what we do on this first Sunday of Advent, as we begin to envision the birth of Christ. And that is what ties this Sunday to what we have done this morning in baptizing these ones. For you see, both Advent and baptism

are about the “already” and the “not yet.” And it is anticipation that ties the two together. What do I mean? Well, as the Rev. Barbara Blaisdell puts it,

When a human heart is waiting for something, the heart begins to take the shape of what it is waiting for.... Our hearts and souls take the shape of what we hope for. In Christ we live by looking forward. Not that we seek to escape the past. We don't! We live all the more fully in the present because we let the present be shaped by what we see in the future!<sup>1</sup>

Anticipation. And although Carly Simon says that anticipation keeps us waiting, it also makes us **human**, it re-affirms for us that God has already done for us and this world amazing, astounding, miraculous things - but it also reminds us that God created us to continue to create with God, for this world is not yet finished, we are not finished, and there is much work to be done in this beautiful, broken, bountiful world.

So, I say to you who have been baptized this day, to those of you who are recalling your baptism or recalling parents who brought you as infants to the baptismal font, and in fact to **all** of you who sometimes may despair that this world isn't what we or God had hoped it might be – **God needs you**. God needs all of us. God needs us to help make ever more real that Advent vision that the prophet Isaiah wrote about. And to live in anticipation – rather than in cynicism or despair or jadedness – makes it that much more possible, that much more likely, for the prophet's Advent vision of

- wholeness and healing,
- swords into plowshares,

---

<sup>1</sup>Rev. Barbara S. Blaisdell, a sermon preached at First Christian Church, Tacoma, Washington, December 1, 2013, entitled “Hoping for More than Christmas.”

- an end to bullying and violence,
- an end to homelessness and hunger,
- an end to children dying because adults lack courage,
- an end to lives that are lived in too much desperation,
- an end to poverty and racism and xenophobia and hatreds based on class or nationality or orientation or gender

to come true. For you see, again in the words of my wife Barbara,

...living in anticipation and hope for that wholeness in us brings us closer to wholeness today.... [because] **Our hearts take the shape of what we most dearly anticipate**. If we've decided the world is going to hell in a hand basket, our hearts will reflect that. But if we've decided that there is, at the beginning and the base of all things, a goodness, a God who is working to redeem this world from all suffering, and we anticipate a day when that work will be complete, well that anticipation will shape our hearts!<sup>2</sup>

My friends, what is shaping your heart this day? Is it resignation – or **anticipation**? Is it a certain sadness at the cycle of the season that brings you before the fact that this world is yet torn and hurting, despite all the Christmases past – or is it anticipation for how God has promised that all things **will** get be made new and whole and healed and who continues to act toward that reality in your life and mine? Hear this good news: On this day of new beginnings, Advent greets us with a promise, a promise

---

<sup>2</sup>Ibid. Emphasis mine.

that once again Barbara so beautifully and eloquent proclaims. Hear her words one final time:

The promise is that God is working to overcome all evil and every form of death. And God invites us to be a part of that battle against evil. God invites us to feed the hungry and house the homeless and to visit the lonely and the grieving; and to wait, to long for and hope for and pray for the completion of these promises.<sup>3</sup>

For the completion of those promises **will** come. Isaiah proclaims it, Jesus embodies it, God assures it. And that is why we can live and move and love in confidence and trust and most of all: **hope**. On this first Sunday of Advent, indeed, let us then anticipate that hope that indeed defines us and shapes us and calls us ever-forward. Thanks be to God!

---

<sup>3</sup>Ibid. My thanks to Barbara for liberal borrowing from her wonderful sermon, and for some key inspirations for this sermon.