

Advent 1B: 12/3/17
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What breaks your heart?

That's a question, as Andy Bravo reported last week, we were asked a couple weeks ago at the Annual Convention of the Episcopal Church in CT. It's quite a question – not just for a church business meeting, but any setting.

What breaks your heart?

I would love to hear us all discussing this at, say, coffee hour. At Convention, we had a couple of moments to reflect on this before sharing our answer with a partner. Then we joined into small groups of eight or so.

Here's what breaks my heart, I told my group:
Rising, overt racism and ethnic hatred,
the reemergence of the Klan and neo-Nazi's and other hate groups
in our country.
It breaks my heart to see the social norms of acceptance, unity in diversity
and inclusivity,
that I'd thought we'd agreed to as a society,
now suddenly fair game to be re-litigated.
It absolutely breaks my heart.

Others went around the group sharing as they felt called.
All were heart-felt, I'm sure.
But there are only two I remember.

One was a young woman representing the Episcopal Church at Yale.
She said it broke her heart that she got so distracted
with her own life that she didn't let her heart be broken.
She was too busy to let herself notice things that might break her heart.
I had to admit, I could relate to that.

Then a man sitting beside me, a new colleague I don't really know,
said it broke his heart that sometimes he forgot to hope.
It broke his heart that he forgot to hold on to the hope of Christ
that things in these troubled times could be different.
The hope that things could be changed, healed.

And I had to admit, I could relate to that too.

Today with the beginning of Advent we start a new church year.
 And I must say we've already gotten off to a promising start.
 In The Great Litany we prayed for just about everything
 there is to pray for,
 declaring that all our life, all our world,
 is worthy of God's attention and care.
 Every "Good Lord, deliver us" we said
 a reminder to hope in God's mercy.

From the flickering of that solitary candle on the Advent wreath
 to each of today's readings,
 all invite us to hope.

"Oh Lord, that you would tear open the heavens and come down,"
 pleads the prophet Isaiah in today's first reading,
 himself writing at a time of dashed hopes.
 "Tear open the heavens and come down..."
 And we know that in God's good time,
 in Jesus, God's Word made flesh,
 Emmanuel: *God with us*, this hope came to pass.

As Paul says in that first letter to the
 (sometimes) disillusioned Corinthians, "God is faithful." Period.

And in today's Gospel,
 as we begin a new year reading primarily from the Gospel of Mark,
 we're challenged to "keep awake" to hope,
 no matter what.

This Gospel was likely written soon after the failed Jewish revolt against Rome
 and destruction of the Jerusalem Temple
 by the occupying Roman forces in the year 70 –
 a time even darker and more unsettled than our own.
 But Mark assures his shell-shocked audience
 that this is not the end of the story.
 God in Christ was active still. God in Christ *is* active still.
 Moving among us, scattering signs like breadcrumbs of a new era to come,
 urging us to follow.
 Urging us to be alert, keep awake,
 take heart, hold on to hope.

Alas, hope doesn't mean that everything will always turn out ok.

Hope is about having the guts and the grace to imagine
that tomorrow can be different,
that tomorrow can be more just and joy-filled.
And as we kindle our spiritual imagination about tomorrow,
we begin, with the love of God and support of one another,
to walk toward it,
to actively *live into* the new day we imagine.
Holding on to hope is about taking that walk,
if only, at first, by baby steps.

So today I ask you, as I ask myself:
How will you walk these twenty-one short days of Advent?
How will you use these days to hold on to hope,
to “keep awake” to hope?

In the end, it doesn't much matter what you do
as long as you *do something* with intention.
Take home and use the devotional booklet we're making available today,
or try the online resources suggested in the bulletin.
Take a break from the latest news and savor the timelessness of silence.
Spend less time racing around buying presents,
and more time figuring out how to give the best gift of all:
your presence.
Light a candle and sit quietly OR take a vigorous walk --
whatever works
to help you focus on kindling your spiritual imagination.

God knows there's plenty to break our hearts these days.
Don't let yours be broken by forgetting to hope.

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