

St. David's Presbyterian Church  
St. John's, NL  
"eHop"  
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November 30, 2008

Advent I

We're coming again into a season that we know oh so well. That's part of the joy of it, also part of the problem. The joy is that we know something of the festival which as the hymn says, "when God becomes a child, there's joy in our song, the last are first, the weak are strong, and none are afraid." There's a little taste of heaven. Then comes the other side of the season: the shopping, the crowds, the impatience, the tempers, and the exasperation. All this comes at us at once. It's hard to sort out all the feelings that come.

Then on top of this we find ourselves in a time of economic uncertainty. Some put their hope in the government doing the right thing. Others take the opportunity to make sure others know that the government is certainly not doing the right thing. The political debate grinds on, and we again are left the emotions of an uncertain time.

I like to think of myself as a positive person. I have my cynical and sarcastic side, but mostly I like to believe that it will all work out well, that people are doing their best to get done what they need to do. They are not out to harm me or others.

But even the most optimistic among us can be hit with little doses of despair. The dreams of staying as a "have" province, of huge numbers of jobs, of great prosperity shared with government employees and everyone else, of large numbers of Newfoundlanders returning and some kind of golden era beginning right now, all feels a bit nebulous, like smoke in the air.

The time when the prophet Isaiah wrote was a mixture of positive and negative elements like our time too. He had seen the fall of the Northern Kingdom of Israel, and their consequent exile. He was now concerned about Judah, which would also see total destruction within the century. He wasn't sure how bad it would be and so he was pleading with God.

He was pleading for mercy, and reminding God of how well he knew that we are clay, and he is the potter. The prophet notes that God's anger toward our sins is well merited. He even uses word pictures such as comparing our

best intentions and deeds as menstrual rags, "filthy." We are a people in need of mercy, in this day, and 2600 years ago.

So the Psalmist in his day wrote songs about how much we need God's care and mercy. Asaph, one of David's chief musicians, wrote Psalm 80 where again we find striking word pictures. He speaks of the bowls of tears we were forced to drink, symbolizing the sadness, grief and loss in a different era of history, but nevertheless, as uncertain as our own. Asaph looks for restoration throughout the song. He longs for God's face to shine upon them. This refers to his love, his truth, his compassion, all the elements of the father's heart longing for the best for his children. This is what Asaph is singing about. He wants God to save them.

The prophets' words and the psalmists' songs are fulfilled in Jesus Christ. He is the One who brings relationship with God and a clear sense of knowing the power and love of the Lord. He is the One who is celebrated today and throughout this season.

He is the One who brings hope. All others may let us down: our friends, our neighbours, our spouses, our children, our teachers, professors, ministers, leaders, just about any group of individuals you can name may let you down. Even what God allows may baffle you.

But we can go to Jesus for hope. He talks about the end of time, when creation reverses, i.e. the sun goes dark, and the moon and stars disappear. He talks about when he is coming back to collect us who know him. He talks about this time and symbolizes it with a parable. He says it like a time when you get house sitters to look after your house while you are gone. And he leaves us with a one word teaching: *Gregoritay*. There's one to learn and practice with your friends. This one Greek imperative verb means, "Stay awake," or "Watch" or "Be prepared."

Don't let the thief steal your Christmas on you. Don't let him steal it from your family or your friends. Be alert and prepared to speak of the One who makes the season what it is. Be alert and prepared to care for those who need care.

Don't let the thief steal your Christmas hope. Don't let him steal the hope you have in your heart for your family. Don't let him steal the hope you

have in your heart for your colleagues at work. Don't let him steal the hope you have for St. John's and for Newfoundland.

Take the time, the moments, the minutes needed to remember why we have this whole time of reflection and celebration. You know it's not about the perfect card or present, like the lies on the TV and radio want to make you believe. It's about the love, the relationships, the care you have for those closest to you and for those who are strangers and far off.

Take a few moments to re-read the beginning of Luke and John in the Bible. Re-read the Christmas story.

Take time to make the hope we talk about a reality within yourself.

Otherwise we have a scrambled season, mixed up, not really any hope, more like eHop (which is not a new electronic dance, but the sermon title). The beginning and the end have been switched so we don't really know why we're doing what we're doing, but we hope it might feel good, but we're not sure.

Send your cards with prayers. Greet your neighbours with good deeds. Do at least one surprising thing, out of the regular routine, for someone else. Try to not make it a material gift, but an immaterial one, like a coupon for time together or something more creative.

Let the Lord surprise you as you bring your list of things to do back to God with open hands.

Let us pray.