

Newsletter Reflection for December

December, the last month of 2022 is near, and even before it begins we are bombarded with retail emphasis on that end of the month celebration...surrounded with decorations, constantly presented with sales promoting purchases of gifts, and a sense of retail urgency to go out and consume. Since I cannot use the outside theme flags I had before I moved into the community where I now live, I tried to find something expressing the theme of November to display in my windows...to express that theme of being grateful or giving thanks...I only found Halloween clearance and Christmas sale items available. Within this climate how do we appropriately enter this season of Advent, a time of preparation and self-examination? How do we anticipate the real gift of Emmanuel coming to us for which we are to prepare when the noise of marketing around us is so loud; the efforts wanting us to rush to Christmas morning for the giving and receiving of those purchased gifts? How do we develop a faithful sense of waiting in hope during this time when it actually appears annually; when it has appeared on our calendars all of our lives...a predictable progression for the four weeks preceding Christmas Day? Each of the Sundays during Advent has a liturgical theme for which we light a candle—symbolizing the light given by that birth. The themes of Advent are framed in terms of hope, peace, joy and love. All things we long to experience. Looking around our broken world, if we take those themes seriously there is much to consider as they are not the reality we see even after some two thousand years of seeking them. The last Sunday of the church year is lifted up as “Christ the King” or the “Reign of Christ” Sunday. As we approach Advent, perhaps a major problem with our ways of celebrating the coming of Emmanuel can be discovered in the terms we use to describe that last Sunday before Advent begins. As one of the last texts from Luke’s gospel reminds us Jesus told his disciples that night that he was a ruler “unlike those of the Gentiles”. He told them he came to serve rather than to be served as he took over the task usually performed by a slave or servant...he washed their feet. Peter’s first reaction to Jesus doing this task was rejection of receiving the service and horror that Jesus would sink so low. Yet Jesus said his disciples must take on that same attitude or they did not belong to him; were not his disciples. How like us to pick up the image of kingship expressing power and quickly moving away from that image of service. Using the term “Reign of Christ” less directly invokes power and rule, but still retains that image of kingship and ruler in power. It is not that Christ and Christ’s teachings should not rule our lives because it is important that they do. But that we should consider how Christ sought to change our understanding of what his kingship means. Should we consider that the reason the themes we lift up at Advent are still so far away from being our lived experience is that we have not accepted and moved away from the world’s image and definition of “kingship” as being displayed by power over others. Throughout the texts in Luke after Jesus set his face to Jerusalem and what that destination would bring, Jesus tells parable after parable about what that reign of God would look like. Always the descriptions led to some surprising endings to the expected outcome for the characters in the

narratives; some very different images of how relationships would be structured within the kingdom or reign of God Jesus described. God's (Christ's) reign called for different priorities being what governed life in the community of God's people. Love was the binding force in all relationships. The least, the lost and the last were all depicted very differently from the images we use and act upon; the way we actually treat others in this world. Christ throughout his lifetime as Jesus kept proclaiming that God's reign was near. What if he wasn't just referring to his physical presence as the embodiment of that truth but the truth that if we lived out what he taught as God's ways, then that reign would become our reality...what if that was the good news we were given and were also being asked to live? After all, the prayer he taught calls for God's will to be done on earth as it is in heaven...not for us to wait for God's will to come at some distant time or in some far off place. If we go into the Advent season hoping to be more Christ-like, seeking to bring peace among those we know and with whom we have differences, showing love to everyone including those with whom we have great differences, surely we would feel great joy. All those themes we use to anchor our journey to Emmanuel's arrival would be closer to being our reality. Just some thoughts on and reflections for our Advent journey.

Shalom,

Pastor Libby