

Sunday, December 8, 2013
Rev. Diane Monti-Catania

Sermon – “Whose Path Are You On?”

What a special day we have today.

We have an opportunity to celebrate the two sacraments of our faith, baptism and communion – reminders of God’s grace in our lives and of the rich traditions that uphold our faith.

We light a candle of hope – reminding us that we are always looking forward, that God continues to bring light into the darkest parts of our lives.

Our Advent hope is not just about some future event however, but also about a new way of seeing and living in the world now.

So we celebrate this particular moment – because this is where we are.

We heard Jesus’ call for his followers to stay alert and watch for the signs of God's Reign in the midst of turmoil.

When this particular gospel account was written, Jerusalem had been sacked for some time, along with the destruction of the Temple, and the believers were under threat of persecution.

Their world had been turned upside down by war and destruction.

The descriptions of people being swept away, of one person being taken while another one is left, is not a reference to an end time rapture, but to events that had already been experienced by the first believers.

Yet, it was in the midst of such turbulent times, that Jesus promised, he would come to his people.

It is in the darkest hour that the light of Christ comes into our lives.

The early church was focused on a future time in history when Christ's return would be complete and their world would be restored.

We can hear Jesus words as a direction to always be alert and watching for the signs of God's presence breaking into our lives.

Our hope today is that we would know God's presence and sustaining strength in the face of this age's great challenges, and that, one day, the world will be healed and made completely new and whole.

This is the promise we hear in Isaiah’s words, “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.”

And so we wait...we wait for the world to become a better place.
But that waiting must be active.

Rather than thinking of spending our lives waiting-which sounds fearful and conjures up images of people lined up in waiting rooms, we can think of ourselves as living in hopeful expectation of God's realm.

Henri Nouwen cautioned that "As we grow in age we are tempted to settle down in a routine way of living and say: "Well, I have seen it all... There is nothing new under the sun...I am just going to take it easy and take the days as they come."

This attitude, he warns, will cause us to lose the creative tension that makes our lives interesting.

If we no longer expect something really new to happen, we become cynical, self-satisfied or simply bored.

Nouwen challenges us to experience waiting with an ever-greater patience and an ever-stronger expectation as we age.

He calls it living with an eager hope – trusting that through Christ, we have been admitted into God's favor.

Anthony Robinson says that part of keeping awake is doing one's own internal and spiritual work, being God-aware.

This is the practice, the discipline, of examining our own lives, as well as paying attention to the world around us.

Robinson points out that while people often seem to associate God with warm emotional feelings, with a sense of peace and contentment; the images in our reading today are violent: a devastating flood and an unexpected break-in by a thief.

So being God aware may mean paying particular attention to those things that are jarring, upsetting, disturbing to us.

We must pay attention to the whole picture that is our lives.

We need to remember and honor our past, look to our future with eager hope, while using all of our gifts and talents right here in our everyday lives.

Eckhart Tolle started his 2004 bestseller, *The Power of Now*, with these words: "You are here to enable the divine purpose of the universe to unfold. That is how important you are!"

While I question much of Tolle's theology, I wholeheartedly agree with the idea that we have a role to play in bring God's kingdom to reality right here, right now.

"Deep within each of us lie goodness unimagined, wisdom, music, talents of every variety, joy, peace, humility and love, a vast goldmine that enables us to give new life to dreams."

Dreams of a world that is at peace.

Dreams of abundance.

Dreams of contentment, security, freedom.

We are called to be dreamers – to be the ones to envision a future where God would want to show up – where Jesus would love to reign.

Today is a day when we worship with our hearts rather than our minds.

It is difficult to look into the eyes of a baby and not soften a bit.

We, however, are most often thinkers.

We are readers.

We analyze and theorize.

We reach conclusions.

But what if we put some of those concrete actions aside and simply allowed ourselves to be swept away by the majesty of God's power and the beauty of scripture, sacrament and music.

What if, in this hour that you set aside for worship, you let your guard down and surrendered to the spirit.

I just finished reading Sheryl Sandberg's book, "Lean In: Women, Work and the Will to Lead."

While I won't go into her commentary on our cultural gender divide, I do want to borrow one of her probing questions. She asks her audience, "What would you do if you weren't afraid?"

I think that is a great question for us as a community of faith.

What would we do if we weren't afraid?

Afraid of change or afraid of difference or perhaps afraid of God?

Could we put our fears aside and try to build the kingdom that Isaiah envisioned – the kingdom of peace?

Could we put our anxiety aside and open our doors to the community to join us?

Could we put our differences aside and embrace our neighbor?

I believe that Jesus' warning this morning to "Keep awake" is not a prophecy for the future.

It is an invitation to pay attention to God's presence in our lives right now.

It is a call to recognize that the kingdom is near, perhaps closer than we imagine – perhaps within our grasp.

This Advent, let's dedicate ourselves to embracing the possibilities of what might be.

Let's decide to be dreamers – to open our hearts and our minds so that we might hear the call of the angels signaling the coming of our Lord and Savior.