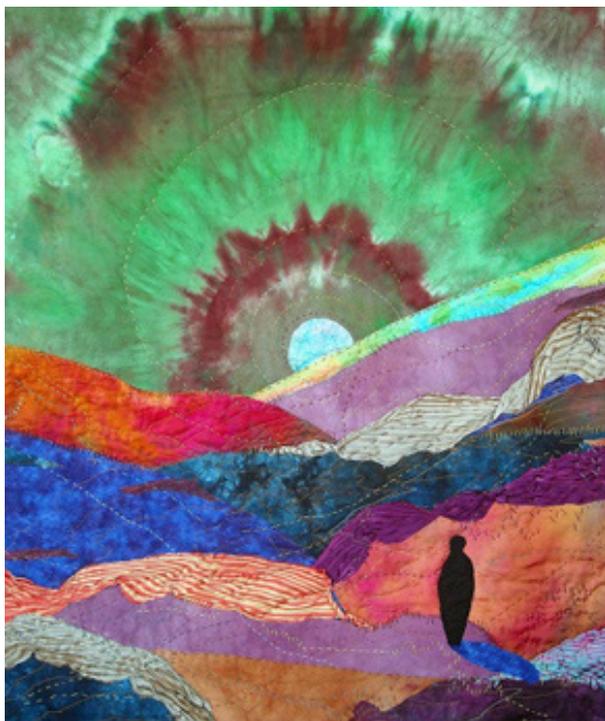


ST. JOHN'S AT DIOCESAN CENTER IGLESIA EPISCOPAL DE SAN JUAN

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TURN. LOOK AGAIN. RETURN.

The Rev. Andrew F. Kline

Text of a Sermon preached the Second Sunday of Advent

December 5, 2021

MALACHI 3:1-4 | CANTICLE OF ZECHARIAH

PHILIPPIANS 1:3-11 | LUKE 3:1-6

In the season of Advent the Church throughout the world invites you to wait. To hold off knowing what you know. Before you sing that Christmas carol or buy the next thing you see on the store shelf, stop. Look around. What else is going on. What are we getting ready to celebrate?

In the season of Advent the Church throughout the world invites you to Prepare. As the carol we will sing on Christmas Eve commands us: prepare him room.

For what and for whom are we making preparation? Why, just this: The Word from on High. The coming of the Ancient of Days. The long foretold Messiah.

We must do some work here because we really have forgotten that two thousand years ago the issue was not settled. As the prophet Malachi warned, as Israel returned from Exile, as they continued to fight among themselves about how to put everything back together, how to go forward as a society, the prophet Malachi reminded them: “the Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to his temple.”

The temple. The temple. The temple. What is so important about this house of God. Solomon’s temple had been a wonder of the world. It was utterly destroyed as Israel was taken into Exile. It would be rebuilt, but it would take hundreds of years, 400 to be exact, for Herod to make it a second wonder of the world - just before it would be destroyed again by the Romans.

The temple, an earthly copy of the reality of the Spirit, is that place that God gave us so that we could literally see the meaning of Jesus’ prayer: God’s will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. If we know where the temple is, and we know what to do there, how to make the proper sacrifices, then we have a home, and we will be ready for his coming.

Home. Is it a place? A people? An ideal? Places become holy to us because in them we can hold all three. Land. Family. Values. Our highest ideals.

Holy places are not the most important things. Holy hearts and hands. Holy feet and eyes dedicated to seeking God are more important. But Holy places are given us so that we can physically return to them. If we cannot always be at home with ourselves, we can be at home where our lives have made sense.

The temple. The temple. The temple. At this time of year, our Jewish brothers and sisters, who are still waiting for the Messiah - notice I did not say ‘their’ Messiah - there is only one Messiah. Our

Jewish brothers and sisters are celebrating Hanukkah. We know it by the distinctive lighting of the Menorah. We might even know the story. The story of a Jewish Civil War that leads to a profanation of the temple, and a revolt that restores the temple. At the moment when the Temple is rededicated, there is only enough sacred oil for one day, but yet it burned for seven days, until the sacrifices could be resumed in the temple.

In his visions, the prophet Malachi may have seen the general Judas Maccabaeus reclaiming the temple from the Greeks, he may have seen Zechariah, father of John the Baptist, in the temple, announcing the messenger. He may have seen Jesus himself entering the temple and reclaiming it from Pharisees, the Saducees, the Herodians and the Romans. My guess is that in his prophetic vision he saw it all. He trusted that God would act.

At this time of year, the prophets, especially John the Baptist, call us to repent. The word repent has more to do with the temple than you think. We know from Zechariah's song, that John by all rights should be in the temple, serving God there. But he cannot be. He is in the wilderness, because God's people are lost. There is too much division. Too much confusion. Too much oppression in the land.

The Greek word repent, *metanoia*, means to have a changed, transformed mind. It is a word linked to sight. The Hebrew word for repent, *shut*, means to turn around and go another way. Or even. To turn around and go home. It also depends upon sight, upon what we can see, because in order to turn around, and travel the road that was once hilly and bumpy and under construction, we must be able to see where we are going! See there Zion, on the highest hill. Head there. There is the temple. There is home.

So thankfully, as the Malachi also foresaw, "See, I am sending my messenger to prepare the way before me." To honor Advent then, we must not try to provoke an outcome. We must not try to make up how we feel and generate a so called Christmas spirit.

My advice, in this season of Advent, wait, prepare, but do not act until you hear the prophet's voice calling you to repent, to return. Pray: Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. On earth. As in heaven. And listen for the voice from there.

Repentance is less sorrow and apologies that it is the process of coming to our senses. As Frederick Buechner says, It is not so much something you do as something that happens. True repentance spends less time looking at the past and saying, “I’m sorry,” than to the future and saying, “Wow.”

In this Advent season, I do hope you have a moment to stop, look around, wait for it, consider where you need to be, where God has set a holy place in your midst, and turn and see what is to be changed. Then when you hear the prophet’s voice, turn, see your future anew, and return home.