

Immanuel United Church
The first Advent Worship | Seeking the Spirit | Bud of Hope
Sunday, Nov 28th, 2021

Choral Introit: VU 1 *O Come, O Come, Emmanuel* (V. 1, 2, 5, 6, 7)

Welcome

Announcements

Call to Worship:

Arise and be bold, good news of hope is here!
The warm glow of the Divine lightens our hearts.

Lighting the first Advent Candle

Candlelighter:
On this first Sunday in Advent, we seek the spirit of hope.
We will dream and imagine a different future,
a rising-up and life-flourishing one.

All:
**God-of-righteous-dreaming,
lighten our hearts with an enlarged imagination to dream new possibilities:
to imagine a world where transformation will happen,
where creation is mended and restored,
and where exiles and strangers will find a home.
Become in our lives the way to what we need,
to what we can become, and to what we can do.**

(Light the first Advent Candle — Bud of Hope)

Hymn: VU 34 O-so-so (Come Now, O God of Peace)

(Singing with action)
O-so-so o-so-so, pyong-hwa-ui-im-gum,
u-ri-ga han-mom i-ru-ge ha-so-so.

(Singing together)

**Come now, O God of hope, we are your people;
pour out your spirit that we be one body.**

Scripture: Luke 21:25-36

There will be signs in the sun, the moon, and the stars, and on the earth distress among nations confused by the roaring of the sea and the waves.

People will faint from fear and foreboding of what is coming upon the world, for the powers of the heavens will be shaken.

Then they will see 'the Holy One coming in a cloud' with power and great glory. Now when these things begin to take place, stand up and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near."

Then Jesus told them a parable: "Look at the fig tree and all the trees; as soon as they sprout leaves you can see for yourselves and know that summer is already near.

So also, when you see these things taking place, you know that the kingdom of God is near.

Truly I tell you, this generation will not pass away until all things have taken place. Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.

"Be on guard so that your hearts are not weighed down with dissipation and drunkenness and the worries of this life, and that day catch you unexpectedly, like a trap. For it will come upon all who live on the face of the whole earth. Be alert at all times, praying that you may have the strength to escape all these things that will take place, and to stand before the Holy One.

The Choir Anthem: Who On Earth Could Know

Reflection: Seeking the Spirit of Hope: An Advent Theatre

Advent and Christmas stories are like two rivers. Advent and Christmas stories meet and flow together, singing a greater story of the apocalyptic cosmos. The stories promise the "end" of terror, tears and distress among disenfranchised people. They cry and call out to all nations to see the signs of a new heaven and a new earth — the birth of the holy one — and therefore, a hope for God. In this cosmic theatre that Advent prophecies and Christmas Nativity stories co-create, powers and principalities in the world tremble and shake. They declare that the world will change:

“Truly I tell you, this generation will not pass away until all things have taken place. (v. 32) Heaven and earth will pass away. (v. 33) The Kingdom of God is near. (v. 31) People will faint from fear and foreboding of what is coming upon the world, for the powers of the heavens will be shaken. (v. 26)”

Nadia Bolz-Weber says, “The theatre has always been an unsafe place for emperors, kings and queens, and politicians. It’s where people revolted and spoke their truth.”

Not only are Advent and Christmas such an unsafe theatre for the kings, our own lives and living reality can be considered to be a theatre which knows danger, sorrow, terror, and grief. Life is its own theatre where suffering is as real as the King Herod, where injustice is as horrible as the Roman census. We cannot remember the year 2021 without thinking about our families and friends during the pandemic time -- those whom we lost, those with whom we could not visit, talk, hug, and /or hold hands, those who, for so long, were isolated in their rooms and homes, those whose employment was lost or unstable. We cannot remember the year 2021 without heartbrokenness and prayers, indignation and despair after the discovery of the remains of 215 children in BC and, shortly after, 751 unmarked graves at the site of a former residential school in Saskatchewan. We remember the suffering of the Afghan people where, for the last several decades, powerful countries, like the Soviet Union, United States and others, have disturbed the culture and its people, enabling the growth of the Taliban. Now the most vulnerable face the unthinkable atrocities by their own people and the poorly planned withdrawal of the armies of the US and the allies. Also, this year, we realize that we are on the edge of a new era: more forest fires, drier summers and historical floods. We are facing the loss of so many species that this is sometimes called “the Sixth Extinction”.

The Advent and Christmas theatre in the Gospels, and in today’s world, has to place Herod in the play. The risk we run if we do not keep him in the stories and reflections as truthfully and as fully as possible is that we can start to sugar coat the real meaning and background of the Nativity. The world in which Jesus was born and God enters, even today, is not the world of the nostalgic, silent-night, peace-on-earth, suspended reality of Christmas. “God slips into the vulnerability of skin and enters our violent and disturbing world. The Christmas story, the story of Herod, the story of the slaughter of the Holy Innocents is as much a part of Christmas and Epiphany as are shepherds and angels.” (Bolz-Weber)

Recently I found the article in the United Church magazine Broadview, December 2021, “Familiar Dystopias: In apocalyptic thrillers like Night Raiders, Indigenous storytellers are using science fiction to shine a light on the past.” (Mike Alexander, an Anishinaabe

writer and artist from Swan Lake First Nation in Manitoba) It features two brilliant films: *Night Raiders* and *Blood Quantum*. Quote: Kim TallBear, a professor in the faculty of Native studies at the University of Alberta, has written that 'Indigenous peoples have been post-apocalyptic since Contact' with Europeans. This shared experience of colonization has allowed Indigenous storytellers to run freely, unapologetically offering observations that can feel uncomfortable for non-Indigenous readers and viewers to digest. Horror, sci-fi, fantasy, and speculative fiction in general are very viable avenues for Indigenous storytellers to illustrate the evils and harms of colonization. There are many opportunities to use metaphor and contextualize the realities of history through fiction. ... The imaginative freedom of horror is a big part of its appeal for Mi'kmaq filmmaker Jeff Barnaby, whose 2019 zombie flick, *Blood Quantum*, earned seven Canadian Screen Awards. ... [Through these sci-fi fictions] Indigenous storytelling asks questions about how the world might be different. ... The reality that I find hard to deal with is that all Indigenous people are in some way touched by stories ... of personal traumas. In many cases, we know a family who has lived true horror. ... I find myself immediately relating to *Night Raiders*, *Blood Quantum* and other stories makes sense. It's way for me to process a world that is full of terrors. ... ***But amid the bleakness is a spirit that can't be crushed***, a space of love and acceptance in the community of Elders, warriors and matriarchs who seek to free Waseese (the child character in the film *Night Raiders*)."

Some children have asked me, (ok, like, my older son) "Can we really believe that it is the real story, that accurately tells us how everything actually happened?"

Our Nativity story is not really about whether everything happened exactly as told, word for word, in the Bible. It's God's apocalyptic sci-fi, theatre, horror, lullaby. It uses the sci-fi freedom to tell the truth, the horror and the beauty - the story of Herod, the story of the Roman Census, the story of the failed plan of slaughter are the stories of horror, which are gently wrapped and enveloped with the story of the quite, holy birth of Jesus, therefore, the story of hope.

Our Advent story gifts us with the ecstasy of seeing God's power of love that be fall on the earth, peace praised. The miraculous event of God's love, the birth of Jesus, heralds the permanent promise of God, as the permanent truth. As Christians have said every year since, "A light shines in the darkness, and the darkness cannot overcome it" (The Gospel of John, 1) "God chose to enter a time as violent and faithless on our own, yes. But the other thing we must confess is that the light of Christ cannot, will not, shall not, ever be overcome by that darkness." (Bolz-Weber) Not by Herod, and not by ... anyone else, by any situation.

In the Advent theatre, King Herod sends out his secret agents to seek and find the baby Jesus and to kill him. "Go and search diligently for the child."

In this Advent season, I invite you to *seek the spirit* that the stories of that first Christmas point to, for us, to discover and go in search of. We will need to identify it, name it, define it in the context of our own lives. Because of greed and fear, King Herod found the wrong reason to "go and search diligently for the child." We will, because of our faith and longing for a just peace for all, go and search diligently for the birth of the Holy One, the light burgeoning from within the depth of midnight. To do this, we will need to know, we will need to name what the horrors of our time are, who and what are the Herods, and who are the Holy Innocents of our times. Can the brokenness of the world be the star that sends us seeking diligently for the Healer? Good news our Gospels tell us is that "amid the bleakness is a spirit that can't be crushed, a space of love and acceptance", the freedom to resist and refuse to be tired, scared, but to go out and seek the spirit of hope. Diligently. Together.

Hymn: VU 7 *Hope is a Star*

Offering

Let us join in the goodwill of Christmas and in the blessings of the Christ child as we give to the glory of God in all creation.

Hymn: VU 55 *In the Bleak Midwinter* (V 4)

**What can I give him, poor as I am?
If I were a shepherd, I would bring a lamb;
if I were a wise man, I would do my part,
yet what I can I give him — give my heart.**

Prayer:

**God of justice, God of grace,
we pray that through this offering we will begin to be more fully your people.
Through these gifts and our lives,
may we help prepare the way of God, Wholly Love.
In the name of the One who comes we pray. Amen.**

Hymn: VU 9 *People, Look East*

Commissioning and Blessings:

And now may the brightness of hope, peace, joy and love
be our gifts as we leave this time and place of worship.

**May the presence of God uplift you,
the gentleness of Christ live in your hearts,
and the wisdom of the Holy Spirit guides you. Today and always.**

Choral Extrait: *Peace, Peace* (words and music by Rick and Sylvia Powell)

**Peace, peace, peace on earth and good will to all.
This is a time for joy, this is a time for love.
Now let us all sing together of peace, peace, peace on earth.**