

THE HOPE JOURNAL

LEARNING TO LOVE, TOGETHER



December 5, 2021

CREATE

the forgotten language of the season

by Drew Downs

One year my Mom tried to get us to make our Christmas gifts for one another. There is some serious backstory to all of this, but suffice it to say, she thought she was offering us an antidote to what ailed us.

My Mom is an artist. So everyone groaned and thought she had a leg up on the rest of us...except that my sister is a potter, my Dad is a woodworker, Rose is crocheter, and I am a writer. So our excuses didn't really fly.

I suspect we can all make our own excuses. All of which I can confidently say are totally unfounded.

As much as we speak of Advent as a season of anticipation, preparation, and watchfulness, it is also a season which invites us into creative thinking. We decorate, scheme, and play. We also bake and love and share. All of us have the tools to be creative. We're also free to use them.

ADVENT

Winter 2021

WHAT'S GOING ON

*"You know we've got to find a way
To bring some loving here today".*

-Marvin Gaye

Happy New Year!

It's Advent. It is amazing and weird that it has once again arrived at our busiest, most distracted time of the year. I know it is coming and yet it always arrives like a surprise.

Advent has a distinct character. Often mistaken for somber or penitential, Advent's focus on anticipation and preparation can be kind of...intense. Which can unleash a bit of sternness in us. This is especially odd when people expect us to be *jolly and festive*.

Advent is not supposed to be so judgey or dismissive, however. It is a season of watching, *observing*. So, like a novelist observes people who will fill her imagination when she sits down to write or a painter collects images to populate his paintings, we aren't feverishly getting ready for the big day so much as seeing our world with new eyes.

Join me and many others this year at adventword.org: a global Advent Calendar filled with people's creativity from around the world. Each day, we share something from *our* world that fits the day's theme. A bit of observing, creating, hoping, and craving.

Drew

ADVENT

Winter 2021

FOR SUNDAY

The Second Sunday of Advent

December 5, 2021

Collect

Merciful God, who sent your messengers the prophets to preach repentance and prepare the way for our salvation: Give us grace to heed their warnings and forsake our sins, that we may greet with joy the coming of Jesus Christ our Redeemer; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever.

Amen.

Reading

From Luke 3:1-6

"[John] went into all the region around the Jordan, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins"

Reflection

It is hard for me to imagine John the Baptizer rounding up a bunch of Episcopalians with a message of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. Maybe in another era. Perhaps a century ago. But not in many more recent years. And really, not since World War II, when the world changed. Life itself changed.

I suspect many people hear the word "repentance" with a bleakness that isn't inherent to the word or its import. As if there is something we fear what is about to be said - an implication of unworthiness and discomfort.

ORDINARY TIME 2021

These words: repentance, forgiveness, and sin: carry a lot of baggage for us. But I also suspect that for *most* of us, that baggage is mostly empty suitcases we haven't bothered to open in years.

To repent is to turn; to change direction. Repentance is the act of turning, changing where we're headed, altering the path we're on, putting a new focus into our lives.

I'm not naive to how the word has been used: to browbeat a people to show fealty toward an angry god. But I also think we're far too afraid of using a word that is central to not only John's ministry, but Jesus's.

Repentance is why we all come to church. Because the direction we are headed on when we're on our own isn't the one we truly want.

The same goes for "the forgiveness of sins". We can make an academic thing out of it, of course, but we all know that we aren't perfect. And because we haven't always been on the best path (and let's be honest, we all struggle with it now), we have done and will do things that hurt: ourselves and others. We all sin. And we all can be forgiven.

When we avoid thinking about repentance, forgiveness, and sin, we avoid thinking about the central claim of Jesus: that we all need the grace of God. And thank God that God is so gracious.

And then, when we remember, we can hear the call to repentance as a welcome invitation. To hope, peace, joy, and love. To true freedom.

ST. STEPHEN'S EPISCOPAL CHURCH
215 N. 7TH ST TERRE HAUTE IN 47807
812.232.5165

STSTEPHENSTH.ORG
