

December 24, 2017

Advent 4

Luke 1:26-38

Grace and peace to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ! Amen.

It's been somewhat of an odd Advent this year; or at least that has been my experience. I mean here we are on the fourth Sunday of Advent. Still waiting, longing, and preparing for the arrival of our Lord. Yet, in just a few hours, many of us will return to this space to celebrate the birth of our Lord Jesus Christ and sing the glorious hymns of Christmas we cherish so much. Quite simply, in my experience this year, Advent has seemingly flown by leaving little room to sit in that space between Christ the King Sunday, the final Sunday of the church year we celebrated the Sunday after Thanksgiving and Christmas Eve. Our Advent Sunday's have been busy with Hanging of the Greens on the first Sunday and the Children's program last Sunday.

As compared to some years of Advent, this year we lost a whole week or at least several days between the fourth Sunday and Christmas Eve. Over the course of this past week I found myself longing for those extra days. Additional time to ponder and reflect. Prepare for the joy we will experience this evening gathered together, the people of God, the body of Christ, to hear yet again how God

revealed Godself to the world in a new and unexpected way in the birth of Jesus Christ. Hence, the movement this morning in our worship setting with intentional moments to silently ponder and reflect. Space to prepare our hearts and minds for what we will experience this evening. Stillness in what for most of us will be a very busy day once we leave this space. Perhaps, shopping still to do for gifts or groceries or maybe its cleaning the house for arriving loved ones.

There was some contemplation early on by the worship team on whether or not to even hold a service this morning. They were concerned about the additional strain it will put on me, which very much moved me. We also were concerned about the additional load it would put on Jill, our pianist, knowing she had two services with us this evening and could quite possibly be playing with our brothers and sisters at Springdale. There was concern about whether or not anyone would even come to worship knowing just how busy this day is and for so many it is simply tradition to come to the candlelight service this evening.

Following some prayer and reflection it was determined to move forward with a morning worship service and I for one am glad we did. Because I need this morning. This time the Lord has provided to prepare for this evening and the coming of our Savior. This time to savor one last morsel of Advent as we quickly transition into Christmas, which you see within our worship itself by the songs we

begin with and the songs we conclude with. This morning is a gift from the Spirit. Yes, we celebrate God coming to us in Christ this evening; however, this morning we lie claim to the fact God is here now. God is meeting us in our moments of silence and stillness. God is breaking into the hustle and bustle of today and tomorrow and giving us an hour to simply be present.

And as I pondered things, how to approach the order of worship this morning, reflecting on what to say, thinking about this evening, and even wishing it was another year with space between the fourth Sunday of Advent and Christmas Eve it dawned on me that just perhaps the way it has played out this year with Advent 4 and Christmas Eve falling on the same day wasn't such a bad thing after all. Perhaps, it was a gift from God to experience something new on Christmas Eve. Like Mary, to ponder God's coming to us. God's favor upon us. To pray. To give thanks for the most precious gift of all that first Christmas and then to gather again in just a few hours to rejoice in the good news.

And so, before we transition into Christmas we take yet one more moment to sit silent, to clear our minds of all those things we have yet to do, and simply be still. Maybe concentrate on our breathing to help calm our bodies. Perhaps focus on a word, phrase or image from our text or a song we have sung. Maybe it's "Do not be afraid" as the angel Gabriel spoke to Mary. Maybe it's "favored one."

Maybe it's, "For nothing will be impossible with God." Whatever it is, let this space and time be a gift from God. An opportunity for God to draw near to us and for the Spirit to once again help draw us near to God.