

SUMMARY: LOOKING AHEAD WITH ANTICIPATORY HOPE

Lamentations 3:21-24

Last week we looked back. And what a year 2020 has been! Who could possibly have guessed the challenges and losses, the enormous adjustments in store for us all! In Canada alone, the over half a million Covid infections, and tragically over 15K deaths... Globally, there has been SUCH devastation with over 82m infections and a death rate rapidly approaching 2m - and with no sign of the spread slowing down. We thank God for the miraculous development of vaccines and pray for their rapid/most effective deployment...

The strain that this Corona virus has on every aspect of our lives – both directly physically, as well as indirectly, on our emotional & mental health & well-being is almost impossible to overstate. I asked last week for us to think about where that leaves us as 2020 ends: ***‘What questions are we left with, what lessons have we learnt about God, about Christ, about ourselves?’*** ...*what are some of the things we’ve discovered matter most in our lives, and what are some of what matters least of all...*

There’s a recent Instagram post by poet Leslie Dwight who challenges us by repositioning last year as being not necessarily our enemy. She asks: ***What if 2020 is the year we’ve been waiting for? ...yes, a year so uncomfortable, so painful, so scary, so raw — but a year that finally forces us to grow? A year that screams so loud, finally awakening us from our ignorant slumber. A year we finally accept the need for change. Declare change. Work for change. Become the change. A year we finally band together, instead of pushing each other further apart.***

What have we most learnt about ourselves, about one another, about God in this past year - oh man - if only we would just take the time to go there, to reflect, to own those lessons! And then to move into this New Year with them. Just what are we choosing to take with us into this New Year that’s just beginning?

Scripture speaks of how having HOPE for the future must always be a function of our looking back! It’s as we know the behavior of something/someone in the past that we are given to develop anticipatory hope for the future! A beautiful Scripture making that point is from Lamentations 3:21-23:

***These things do I recall to my mind, and therefore I have hope.
God’s loving-kindnesses indeed never ceases,
God’s compassions never fail.
They are new every morning - Great is Thy faithfulness O God.***

FOR WHAT ARE YOU PRIMARILY HOPING IN 2021? There is so very much out there, waiting/needing us to address in this coming year. Of course there’s the on-going Covid crisis and our own personal responsibilities and attitudes: our commitment to staying safe and in compliance with all the various provincial health orders. We know too that we are all also still very much part of the on-going global climate crisis, and there’s our very real responsibilities associated with mitigating that.

And that's not even beginning to touch on any of the immediate challenges that each of us are facing in our personal everyday lives: health concerns, relationships, financial perhaps... And there is the awareness of our own spirituality! The blessing/ the challenge, is for us never simply to ignore these as if they don't exist, but neither is it ever to be so overcome by them that we do nothing!

Surely, as followers of the Christ for whom even death was not the end, we continue to address all of these – but our commitment **MUST** be for us to do so with all the anticipatory hope and God-given energy that a Christ-raising God intends.

We are about to share Holy Communion together – the sacrament of eating and drinking physical bread and wine/juice at Jesus' command – the sacrament which is intended to remind us of Christ's actual, sacred & empowering presence as being always with us – and with all creation. We are not alone – there is God's holiness all around us - we are always with Him and in Him, we are with one another.

Richard Rohr says it most clearly, how that's what the whole miracle of incarnation is all about! ***Christianity's true and unique story line has always been incarnational. ...the spirit nature of reality (the spiritual, the immaterial, the formless) and the material nature of reality (the physical, that which we can see and touch) are all actually one.*** We're speaking scripturally about the ***essence of God which has become one with all creation, the love of God that longs for incarnation from before the beginning. ...the co-creativity of God, always inviting, never compelling***ⁱ.

I asked earlier: *for what are you primarily hoping in 2021?* With all of what comes to mind, may there also be under it all our very real desire to become much more aware of this holy oneness with all creation that we have in Christ than we have been, and may that awareness move us to own and be the blessing to others that God has always intended us to be.

ⁱ Christopher Pramuk, cited by Richard Rohr (*From the Center for Action and Contemplation, Summary: Week Fifty-one Incarnation December 20 - December 25, 2020*)