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Trinity Cathedral
Second Sunday of Advent
Dec. 8, 2019

The nights are growing still longer, and the days shorter. We wait for when the dawn comes earlier, but it is not yet.

We are in the in-between time — the time of waiting, the time of expectancy for the new — the time of not yet. We are in the time of Advent.

The culture around us says otherwise and knows nothing of Advent.

The culture says this is the Christmas season. The trees are up, the lights glittering, the ads everywhere, and the celebrations have begun.

The world urges us to frantic activity – hit the malls, buy more stuff, eat more sweets, celebrate, celebrate, celebrate.

But here, in the Church, Christmas is not yet. We hold back the “Merry Christmas” greeting.

Here, in the Church, we wait. We prepare, we scale back. We take a deep breath, we ready ourselves for the feast of the Incarnation.

We take stock, we ask what is important, we wonder what is to come. We wait. And that makes Advent radically countercultural, and a gift to each of us.

Now, I am not trying to rain on your Christmas tree. We started decorating yesterday. And I enjoy the parties, too.

But, for some, this time of year may feel empty and the celebrations forced. Maybe you’ve lost someone close to you, or you are struggling with a relationship, or a health issue, or a disappointment, or a personal issue.

This Advent is especially a gift to you.

Our world is living in the in-between time even if it does not know Advent. We await the next chapter in our politics, in our economy, on the Border, and on our streets in this city where so many are unsheltered. We wonder what comes next.

And we await the next chapter in the life of our beloved Cathedral.

Let’s not rush through this in-between time. Advent gives us permission to slow down, take notice of what is important, and to notice what is good and whole around us and within each of us.

Advent is especially a time of hope that the new is emerging even when we don’t see it, that the clouds of worry will clear, that peace and freedom, justice, truth and love will ultimately prevail [Hymn 65].

Christmas will come, and there will be 12 whole days to celebrate it. But not yet.
A friend of mine, Susan Goff, one of the bishops of the Diocese of Virginia where I once served, sent her annual Advent message a few days ago to her diocese.

She had an unusual bit of spiritual advice – at least unusual coming from a bishop.

She suggested the following spiritual practice: That we take 10 minutes a day to enjoy a hot beverage our choice – and not in front of the computer screen or while driving to work.

Just 10 minutes a day, sitting by yourself, with nothing else to do except enjoy a hot cup of Joe. Here is what Bishop Susan writes:

“Close the door on everything else for ten minutes as you drink it. You can talk to God as you would to any friend with whom you share a cup.”

“You can spill out your anger and hurt, as you would with a loved one whom you know deep down will love you no matter what.”

“You can sit in complete silence as you would with someone who knows you so well that you don't have to say a word. Just sit. Just be. Just for the time it takes to drink one cup.”

Be at home within yourself this Advent.

Feel the stirrings of the Holy Spirit within you. And be ready once again for the coming of Jesus into this world, and not just as a historical figure of the past, but as a real presence now, today, and tomorrow, and for all time.

To truly prepare, we must also acknowledge the brokenness in our world, and the brokenness in ourselves. Where are we wounded? Who have we wounded? What have we done and left undone?

And that is why it is so important that we gather together as this community. We come together to hold each other up, cheer for each other, laugh together, and sometimes cry for each other, especially in the in-between times.

Why would we want to navigate this journey alone? Why would we want to bear our wounds alone?

Many have gone before us facing the same challenges we, and doing so together as community of faith.

We enter our Advent journey once again by hearing the story of our ancestors in an in-between time long ago. The come to hear John the Baptist – this larger-than-life character who eats locusts and honey, and wears coat of camel’s hair and a thick leather belt around his waist — looking pretty grungy, no doubt.

He is standing at the River Jordan, telling everyone within earshot to repent, to turn their life around.

Notice that people from the city of Jerusalem and all the Judean countryside are coming to him. Something about him draws them there.
Some of these people might think he is some kind of a God, or maybe a prophet come back to life.

But he tells them no, he is not any of that. He tell them to wait for the One who is to come – the One is already here.

Soon, Jesus will come the River Jordan, and he will step into the water to be baptized, and then he will step out into the world to turn it upside down.

He will bring good news to the poor, heal the sick, and free the captives of whatever binds them.

And he will feed the hungry – and feed us – with the bread that lasts forever.

But, now, we wait.

Amen.