

An Advent Reflection - Small Things and Possibility

We live in a world in which bigger and better define our expectations for much of life. We have become so enamoured by super size, super stars, and high definition that **we tend to view life through a lens that so magnifies what we expect out of the world that we tend not to see potential in small things.** But as the prophet Zechariah reminds us (Zech 4:10), we should not "despise the day of small things," because God does some of his best work with small beginnings and impossible situations.

It is truly a humbling experience to read back through the Old Testament and see how frail and imperfect all the "heroes" actually were:

- Abraham, the coward who cannot believe the promise.
- Jacob, the cheat who struggles with everybody.
- Joseph, the immature and arrogant teen.
- Moses, the impatient murderer who cannot wait for God.
- Gideon, the cowardly Baal-worshipper.
- Samson, the womanizing drunk.
- David, the power-abusing adulterer.
- Solomon, the unwise wise man.
- Hezekiah, the reforming king who could not quite go far enough.
- And finally, a very young Jewish girl from a small village in a remote corner of a great empire.

It never ceases to amaze me that **God often begins with small things and inadequate people.** It certainly seems that God could have chosen "bigger" things and "better" people to do His work in the world. Yet if God can use them, and reveal Himself through them in such marvellous ways, it means that He might be able to use me, inadequate, and unwise, and too often lacking in faith that I am. And it means that **I need to be careful that I do not in my own self-righteousness put limits on what God can do with the smallest things,** the most unlikely of people, in the most hopeless of circumstances.

I think that is part of the wonder of the Advent Season.

I am convinced that one of the main purposes of the incarnation of our Lord Jesus was to provide **hope.** While most people today want to talk about the death of Jesus and the Atonement of sins, **the early**

Church celebrated the Resurrection and the hope it embodied. It was a proclamation of **a truth that rang throughout the Old Testament**, that **endings are not always endings but are opportunities for God to bring new beginnings.** The Resurrection proclaimed that truth even about humanity's greatest fear, death itself.

Both the season of Advent and the season of Lent are about hope. It is not just hope for a better day or hope for the lessening of pain and suffering, although that is certainly a significant part of it. It is more about hope that human existence has meaning and possibility beyond our present experiences, a hope that the limits of our lives are not nearly as narrow as we experience them to be. It is not that we have possibility in ourselves, **but that God is a God of new things and so all things are possible** (Isa 42:9, Mt 19:26, Mk 14:36)

God's people in the first century wanted Him to come and change their oppressive circumstances, and were angry when those immediate circumstances did not change. But that is a shortsighted view of the nature of hope. **Our hope cannot be in circumstances, no matter how badly we want them or how important they are to us.** The reality of human existence, with which the Book of Job struggles, is that God's people experience that physical existence in the same way that others do. Christians get sick and die, Christians are victims of violent crimes, and Christians are hurt and killed in traffic accidents, bombings, war, and in some parts of the world, famine - the problems of natural evil.

If our hope is only in our circumstances, as we define them to be good or as we want them to be to make us happy, we will always be disappointed. **That is why we hope, not in circumstances, but in God.** He has continually, over the span of over four thousand years, revealed Himself to be a God of **newness**, of **possibility**, of **redemption**, the recovery or transformation of possibility from endings that goes beyond what we can think or even imagine. The best example of that is the Crucifixion itself, followed by the Resurrection. That shadow of the Cross falls even over the manger.

Yet, it all begins in the hope that God will come and come again into our world to reveal Himself as a God of newness, of possibility, a God of new things. This time of year we contemplate that hope embodied, en-fleshed, incarnated, in a new born baby, the perfect example of newness, potential, and possibility.

During Advent, we long for that newness with the hope, the expectation, indeed the faith, that God will once again be faithful to see our circumstances, to hear our cries, to know our longings for a better world and a whole life (Ex 3:7). **And we hope that as he first came as an infant, so he will come again as King!**

My experience tells me that those who have suffered and still hope; understand far more about God and about life than those who have not. Maybe that is what hope is about: a way to live, not just to survive, but to live authentically amidst all the problems of life with a Faith that continues to see possibility when there is no present evidence of it, just because God is God.

That is also the wonder of Advent.

We have just ten Sundays before Advent begins... are ten weeks enough to prepare for this Season of Advent?

God Bless you.

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