

ADVENT ONE AND BAPTISM

NOVEMBER 28, 2010

When Sarah asks, in days to come, “Mom, Dad, tell me a story” I hope you’ll tell her the story of the day she was baptized. Tell her that it was the first Sunday of Advent – the Sunday of hope. And tell her that for this congregation of Christ’s people, SHE was a sign of hope. Tell her that.

Tell her that some of us were here this morning needing hope; needing it badly. Carrying heavy burdens that no one knew, and waiting to hear a word from God – longing to know that whatever the present reality of our lives, the future is open, and belongs to God. Tell her that when you brought her forward, and stood on your feet and said yes to the questions – offering this precious life – offering your daughter back to God who gave her in the first place....and when the waters splashed into the font and when we stood on our feet and promised to accept her as a sister...tell her that in some way we can’t explain, the world looked different - and there was a song in our hearts when we left where silence had been before. Tell her thank you for that.

The stories you tell her will help her learn who she is. And whatever else she learns about that, I pray most fervently that she will come to know herself as a child of hope. It will be your words that will ground her in hope – we will help all we can. She will learn hope from her family at home, and from her family at church.

There will be much in her life that will try to take her hope away. The world can be a hope sucking, soul numbing place.

You may know that I spend some time on facebook. The reason I got started at that is that that’s where to find young people. I’ve been in touch with two young girls lately –not from here - who have lost their ability to hear and feel hope. One of them can see no good in the world at all. Her daily posts say things like “I don’t know why I bother” “another horrible day” and so on. The other girl, a beautiful talented young woman with so much to give....simply is unprepared to hear anything good about herself; believes that she is a mistake in the universe, and cuts herself to focus the pain.

You could tell stories just like that I know, and so could I...sadly, they are neither surprising nor rare. But these are the two faces I saw in front of my own face as I got ready to write about hope. If Sarah ever gets to that place in her life.... when she questions her identity, and feels that life is not worth living and that she herself is unimportant of little value....if she ever comes to question the goodness of the world and the promise of God, then I pray that she will hear - somewhere in her heart -, the words from today “Sarah Butterfly Thorson Dissman, I baptize you in the name of Jesus, who is one with God and the Holy Spirit” I pray that she will hear the words that name her and claim her as God’s very own, precious and lovely in God’s eyes – worth everything.

Some people say words don’t really mean anything – “Oh yea it’s easy to talk, talk is cheap – “ Ah, but words have power. Ask anyone who has been on the receiving end of name calling. Words have life...power to create and to destroy – to built and plant, to pluck up and pull down. Words have power.

Words create worlds. Words can give hope. And please God, may the words we speak today at Sarah's baptism create for her a world of meaning and life sustaining hope.

Hope is the first gift of Advent – and from the prophet Isaiah we heard the words that have never been forgotten and have kept the vision of the world as God's peaceable realm – kept that vision alive for thousands of years.

They shall beat their swords into ploughshares and their spears into pruning hooks;

Nations shall not lift up sword against nation. Neither shall they learn war any more.

Written on the wall of the United Nations building; written in hearts and in dreams of people all over the world who hold their babies as gently as you hold this child today – and want for them the world that you want for her.

Isaiah's words spoken in the midst of a nation in chaos and moral abandonment.....words that held out the possibility and promise that the shame and violence of the present hour is not our only choice; is not our home. And reminding us that – in spite of the news in Haiti, in Korea, in Pakistan and on and on

That the future belongs to God and we are NOT powerless....it is ours to not only live in hope but live as people who trust the one in whom we hope. God keeps promises. GOD KEEPS PROMISES and for every sword in our hands and hearts, God's promise calls us to not lay it down passively and walk away, but rather to beat it, with the sweat of our own imperfect labour, beat it into an instrument of life and peace and hope.

Isaiah's words have that kind of power. Your own words do as well.

Let our words this Advent season be words of hope - words that dismantle the weapons of war that take away life and love and hope from people – words that speak the truth – GOD LOVES THIS WORLD WITH A WILD AND CRAZY LOVE THAT CHERISHES ALL LIFE AND CALLS TO US UNTIL WE LIVE INTO THE HOPE THAT IS OUR RIGHT AND OUR HERITAGE AS GOD'S CHILDREN. GOD'S LOVE WILL NEVER LET YOU GO. THE WORLD HAS MEANING AND YOUR LIFE MATTERS FIERCELY. THE WORLD IS GOD'S HOME AND THE FUTURE CAN BE DIFFERENT FROM TODAY.

Of all the gifts that you'll give your daughter during her life, this is one of the greatest – a family of faith to help her hear that hope and remind her of it when she can't remember it for herself.

One of the greatest gifts we can give each other – one of the most powerful things that the church can do – is to hold one another up when we are feeling hopeless. There are sometimes when I can't pray – and when I am in that place I come here - and you stand by me in the numbness of my silence, and you pray the words that I cannot.

And there are times when I am feeling hopeless and when I do I come here and you speak the words I long to hear and you say them and sing them until I can do it again for myself.

You will never give Sarah a more precious gift than this.

May she – and you – always live in hope - And may we be for one another the hope we cannot live without.

Carolyn McDade's song says it best.....

COME, SING A SONG WITH ME, COME SING A SONG WITH ME

COME SING A SONG WITH ME THAT I MAY KNOW YOUR MIND

AND I'LL BRING YOU HOPE WHEN HOPE IS HARD TO FIND

AND I'LL BRING A SONG OF LOVE AND A ROSE IN THE WINTERTIME.