

Sermon for Advent 1, Year A
Sarah Kye Price, Seminarian
Grace and Holy Trinity Episcopal Church

November 27, 2016

Greetings on this first Sunday of Advent, the beginning of a new liturgical year and the start of a season of holy waiting. I've had the opportunity to meet and talk with many of you, but I realize some of us haven't had the pleasure of getting to know each other yet. In September, I began worshipping and learning with you as your seminarian intern, part of the requirements in the Diocese of Virginia for those of us preparing for ordination. One of the joys that I have is to worship with this community...a sea of new faces to me...and learn who you are, hear your stories, share my journey, and for us to discover the ways in which we can be Church together. I live in Ginter Park and have worshipped at St. Thomas' Episcopal Church since moving to Richmond in 2006 with my husband and daughter. But for the past 10 years, I've also been a sort of parish neighbor to you all...working every day about a block and a half away as a faculty member in the School of Social Work at VCU.

As I was preparing my homily for this week, it occurred to me that ten years ago I would never have imagined that the journey I was taking would have led me to stand in this place, at this time, under these circumstances. The field of social work has been the place where I have lived out my baptismal covenant: seeing and serving Christ in all persons; respecting the dignity of every human being. It was in that very act of doing exactly what I was already called to do...living out my vocational strengths as a baptized Christian...that in Advent of 2012 I would begin to experience God's call on my life to serve God's church. It's been a joyful and unexpected journey that has highs and lows, blessings and challenges. I have learned that formation for ministry is a process of preparation, of opening to the movement of God in my life.

But a few years ago, I wasn't thinking about "preparation." I was entirely focused on planning. I am, most assuredly, one of those "Type A" personalities; a firm "J" on the Myers-Briggs spectrum. That means I find comfort in lists, and take great joy in checking things off. Sure, there is awe and wonder in listening to the voice of possibility, in responding to the desire to love and serve God and community in new ways. But, there were a lot of details to be thought through. How would I possibly go back to seminary? What would all this mean for the career steps needed to succeed in the academic life? Could I be a priest and a teacher and a social worker? What did I need to give up? How much would it cost in time, money, and energy? How could I

check off all the to-do list items so that I could get to where I'm called to be? And...the inevitable question...what would that look like at the end, anyhow? Yes, there were (and are) plenty of planning questions to keep me thoroughly preoccupied by the details of the journey.

But planning is not the same as preparing.

In today's Gospel, Jesus offers an exhortation to his disciples...it is a call to readiness for those who are already committed to following Him: we do not know the day or the hour when we will be called up to service. We will be doing our jobs, living into our worldly, productive well-planned lives when the world as we know it will change. "Keep awake, therefore, for you do not know on what day the Lord your God is coming." Although we can read eschatological and global apocalyptic warnings into passages like these, the simultaneous truth is that each one of us lives our everyday lives unaware of exactly when we will be pressed upon to bring all of who we are, to all that God is calling us to be.

Planning keeps us in control; Preparing opens us to possibilities known by God alone.

This word for "prepare" to which we are exhorted: ἑτοιμοί: "hetoimos" would be most fully translated as "to be made ready", to be on stand by, to stand wholly and completely ready to serve. That, my friends, is a tall order. It means so much more than planning. The Apostle Paul echoes this same exhortation to the church in Rome, which rings through the ages to our own ears: we are called to wake up from sleep, to lay aside the works of darkness and put on the armor of light which is to put on the essence of our Lord Jesus Christ. This degree of preparation is not a "to do" list. It is an exhortation to be prayerful, mindful and open to the call continually emerging in our lives, individually and collectively, as members of Body of Christ.

So, how do we prepare?

Our ordinary lives which we live out in ordinary time bring us through the liturgical year to this new season of Advent. But those ordinary days have offered us great insight leading into preparation. I love to cook, so I'm intrigued listening to great chefs talk about the "mise en place" that allows a fine meal to emerge: everything is in its place, ready to be brought together at the precise moment in culinary time, creating something far greater and more delicious than the sum of its parts. Any athlete...or musician....will tell you that it is practice, practice, practice which builds both endurance and aligns our bodies, minds, and intentions for successful performance. Scouts learn to "always be

prepared” and stand at the ready to do duty for God and country, for other people, and for themselves. We each bring our vocational preparation: Physicians...scrub up! Musicians...tune up! Students...study up!

But the phrase that I think resonates the most with me right now comes from my friends, my students, my colleagues who live in the daily struggle to be seen, and heard, and respected. “Stay Woke” has become a media catch-phrase of many millennials, like my students. This phrase, which was given voice within the Black Lives Matter movement, urges us to see with new eyes the ways in which life is happening all around us, to know what is really happening in our community and in our world instead of simply taking in what we see at face value. Don’t go through the motions, Don’t be satisfied with the status quo: Stay Woke. Echoing the words of St. Paul: now is the moment for us to wake from sleep. It is time for each and every one of us from our own unique vantage point to be awake to see the appearance of Christ in our lives, to be at the ready to live into the call to which we are invited in our Christian faith and life.

But, I still love a “to do” list. So, how are we to prepare...to be ready to live into this call? Here are some prayerful, heart-opening things we can do, right here and right now:

- We gather all of who we are and bring ourselves wholly as an offering to God.
- We are met and formed together in Holy Eucharist as the Body of Christ.
- We stay awake, and learn to see Christ in each other not only in our similarities, but in our differences.
- We practice living into the kingdom of God on earth, as it is in heaven.
- We stay together and pray together, even when it would be easier to walk away.
- We boldly and courageously love, opening our human eyes to see the coming of Christ in our lives, in our community, and in our world.

It’s Advent: Stay awake. Be Prepared. Come, Lord Jesus.

Amen.