

Hopeful Waiting
A sermon preached by The Rev. Dr. Deborah Hart
at Eglinton St. George's United Church
Advent 1, November 29, 2009

Yesterday I was downtown at The Canadian Stage to see the play “Seven Stories” by Morris Panych. For the whole hour and a half of the play with no intermission a man stands on a seventh floor apartment ledge, ready to jump to his death. But with scenes reminiscent of Rowan and Martin’s TV show, *Laugh-in*, where windows keep opening and heads pop out with words of nonsense or quite clever questions, the various window shades of the 7th Floor keep opening and revealing the lives of those who live there with their own complex predicaments. There is lots of humour and wit as we see the absurdity of parts of our lives but also some unique wisdom. It’s on for another week, so I won’t give away the ending.

Obviously I chose the title for my brief meditation before I saw the play. Yet it could easily have been the play’s title. Whenever the man is about to jump, another window opens and he waits, expectantly, for someone to make sense of life and offer him some hope. Ironically, little hope comes; in fact, a nurse and a 100 year-old woman try to convince him to jump sooner than later!

Without hope, the world disintegrates into deep despair. With hope, a ray of light sneaks through the closed shutters. Hope turns our closely held inner thoughts and concerns outwards and adds the bigger perspective, so that we come to believe that maybe around the corner lies a new possibility, that God holds something more in store for us.

The season of Advent could not exist without hope. Advent means “to come”, to look forward. It is a time of waiting and a time of hope. Yet as Bruce Sanguin said a couple of weeks ago, our waiting is not passive. It is not as though God pretty much did it all 2,000 years ago, and we look back and remember, and now we’re just waiting for God to return and finish up a few details. And it is not as though we should be busy in this waiting time, trying to earn ourselves enough “brownie points” to get us into some distant heaven.

No, we are to be busy *being* the people of God; the Divine plan is unfolding within and through you and me. We’re not waiting for *God* to swoop in and produce some happy ending. We’re the ones charged with writing the present and future script. God’s presence, God’s coming, will happen in and through *us* by the Spirit. *We* are the incarnation now: the Word made flesh in concrete form today; the Word made real and brought to life in our relationships and our actions.

The stories of Advent are about people saying “Yes” to doing their part, big or small, in the unfolding drama of life – be that the prophet Isaiah, John the Baptist, Mary or Elizabeth or Joseph. When we feel inadequate to add our “Yes”, we need only ask: “One baby? How can that be enough for God to use?”

A couple of weeks ago someone on the Pastoral Care Team asked: “Can we send Christmas cards to people in prison?” The vision grew, and on Wednesday 5 people met and prepared

about 75 cards to send to those in prison on our behalf, letting them know someone is thinking of them this season.

One person in our midst who finds the winters to be long and sometimes depressing asked a couple of years ago about inviting a few in the congregation to knit for others. Since then hundreds of “preemie” babies have had warm hats; and for the 2nd Christmas over 130 teens through Eva’s Phoenix will receive beautiful warm scarves with the Christmas dinner that we will serve in a few weeks.

Another person here heard of a project started in Vancouver to put together great music under the theme of healing with proceeds to benefit the homeless. She ordered 50 CDs, sold them mostly on one Sunday and now \$375 will go to Fred Victor Centre on our behalf.

We are *not* a people who stand around in despair waiting for the world to unfold for better or worse. Hope is strong and alive in this place of faith and leading to action. May it continue to blossom once more within our hearts and inspire each of us to do our part to make the presence of the living Christ real and felt in our city and our world. For in this way we can pray: “Come, O Come, Emmanuel, God with us, God within us, and bring light to the world for... All (the) earth is waiting”. Amen. (*Sing hymn: “All Earth is Waiting”*)