

“A Season of Hope”
Advent 3 – Dec 16, 2018 – Luke 3:7-18/C

As the gospel passage begins today you might be tempted to say, “*What is this so-called Text of Terror doing in the middle of my Christmas preparations?!* ” And how can John’s proclamation be heard (as the passage says), “*with many other exhortations, John proclaimed **the Good News.*** ” Wow. Not exactly the kind of Peace on Earth, Good Will to All we are anticipating...

And yet, here we are only half way through Advent – that time of preparing, waiting and hoping. Anticipating with joy the days to come, even as we live in the days that are, with regular, “one foot in front of the other” day-to-day duties and disturbances. We are not so unlike those who came before us – in some cases like a phrase from a Yeats poem, we might feel like we are *Slouching Towards Bethlehem*.

The Advent to Christmas journey is nothing if not disorienting. “*No we don’t need more sleep. It’s our souls that are tired, not our bodies. We need nature. We need magic. We need adventure. We need freedom. We need truth. We need stillness. We don’t need more sleep, we need to wake up and live.* I read you this quote two weeks ago as we began our midweek reflections and the beautiful Vesper service, *Holden Evening Prayer*.

Then, it spoke to me about our souls’ needs: Nature. Magic. Adventure. Freedom. Truth. Stillness. And yet this morning, it is shouting to me just like John the Baptist was shouting in the wilderness. Everyone seems to be **shouting** these days: our children, our spouses, our friends, the media, our co-workers, our bosses, the endless stream of holiday need. Shouting to be heard. Shouting for our attention, shouting so that we might not hear the whispering that says our souls are tired because we have not allowed God to use us.

And just as ancient people held their breath at the Winter Solstice - we too might wonder if the sun that’s gone further and further away from us will, actually, turn back towards the Earth and not continue to hurtle away from us into eternity – and we might find ourselves holding our breath and holding on for dear life, so that we do not get sucked in to the holiday din.

But John the Baptizer can be heard even over all the other noise. God wants to feed our souls. How? God wants us to wake up and live. Perhaps, differently. John’s warning of the ax lying at the root of the tree is not simply to scare us into repentance and the bearing of good fruit. It is a picture of how to prepare for Jesus to come! The ax is poised; soon the woodcutter will pull back and let that ax fly to its purpose. And you? You are among the legion of woodcutters.

Did you know that last year doctors and sports medicine researchers agreed that their research into a golfer’s swing determined that their backswing is the single most important thing to a great golfer. Not the grip, not the stance, not the placement of the ball...the back swing. Because that’s where the power lies.

Today we are poised to take the final backswing that will move us through the last half of Advent and into Christmas. But God doesn’t want us to stop there. Because we have received the gift that God has promised, and that simply frees us to DO what our souls desire: what God calls us to do...different for each one of us, and yet filled with the peace of Christ, the love within our community, the joy of celebration and hope for a better world – a world that God so loves.

No, we do not need more sleep. We need to work on our backswing. ‘Cause that is where the power is. Amen.

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Resources: “*We don’t need more sleep*” quote by Brooke Hampton; *Slouching Towards Bethlehem*, Joan Didion (from W.B. Yeats) and *Texts of Terror* title from Phyllis Tribble. “*How Important is Your Back Swing?*” GlenMuir 31 Aug 2017.