

Companions on the Way



Worship Resources

Advent



Overview: Weeks 1 - 4

Week One: Awake

"... it is now the moment for you to wake from sleep." (Romans 13:11)

Most spiritual traditions have the theme of awakening as one their primary messages. But what are we awakening to? Isaiah can be read as quite triumphant. Matthew can be read as quite frighteningly about end-times. And Romans makes it clear that believing, or conversion to the Christian faith, is not necessarily awake enough! It may seem that after all these years (and some of us have been celebrating and earnestly "doing" Advent for decades) we are waiting still to be awake enough!

One way of understanding the perennial call to awaken is that we all live historically and spiritually in between the time of the historical incarnation of the divine in human flesh (the time of Jesus walking upon the earth) and the second coming, or fulfilment of the human-divine relationship. Our awakening then is in this context of always coming to experience more fully the implications of the incarnation and the still to be fulfilled potential of our part in the cosmos. In a sense then we are always awakening, growing in awareness and enlightenment (or being filled with the light). So, year after year it is right that we should be reminded of the need to awaken. And season after season we grow in grace because we grow not from our starting place at the beginning but from where we are now.

Week Two: Prepare for the Reign of God

Well this sounds a bit more like Advent- Isaiah gives us messages of hope and images of natural enemies like the lion and the lamb lying down together. Well yes and not so much. Yes, these

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are hope filled messages of what the world living out of God's notions of justice and mercy might look like. But once again these are pretty-demanding and provocative statements about what is required of the person of faith and the people of faith. God is not going to do all the work. and even the work that God does will be fairly-hard spiritual and psychological work - an axe to the root of the tree and a winnowing fork with chaff for the fire.

Christians have often interpreted these sorts of Scriptures as suggesting that individual persons and whole groups of persons are going to be in (the surviving shoot or the wheat rather than the chaff) or out (the pruned branches and the chaff) but this is a rather black and white reading of colourful nuanced metaphors. Any farmer or agricultural worker in Biblical times would have known that pruning and sorting were normal agricultural practices and that they were not necessarily signs of wrongdoing or failure. Rather we might see them as images of the rigorous work of encouraging growth and recovery in order to yield a good harvest.

Week Three: Rejoice, even Fools shall not lose their way

I love our reading from Isaiah this week. What is not to love? Images of gardens dripping with moisture and beauty in the barren lands; feeble hands and knees strengthened again; the most marginalised - the blind and the lame - able to participate fully. Even vengeance- if we desire it- will be taken care of for us. If we only had this reading we could hear that we get to faithfully prayerfully sit back and wait for God's generous righteous reign to get started.

But read in the context of the other readings it is a bit more complex than that. Indeed, heard all together it poses a question about for what and for whom are we waiting?

Week Four: Coming Ready or Not

At long last the Christmas story we have all been waiting for. Sort of. Once again hearing the gospel in the context of the prophets and psalmists both makes the meaning more emphatic but also more complex.

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We think the way in which Jesus saves us is by dying for us. This is what we celebrate every Easter and every Sunday when we take part of the holy meal. And, of course it is true that the death of Jesus has a salvific effect. But there is no talk of death here. The prophecy and the gospel focus is all on birth and those who contributed to the birthing of Emmanuel by prophesying, by dreaming, by succumbing to the spirit. At the very least we need to hold birth and death as intertwined and of equal importance. Not just to be polite or theological fair but because you cannot have one without the other. Indeed, with Jesus it is always birth into life, death and resurrection into the bigger cosmic life. This is not a cute small story. It is no less than the pouring of divinity into human life with all the delight and vulnerability that birth means.

Now we are ready to celebrate the remembrance of the birth of baby Jesus and to invite the Christ into our world.

More information:

-  Website: www.companionsontheway.com
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