



“[F]or my eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the presence of all peoples, a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel.”

–Luke 2:30-32

Greetings Members and Friends of Bainbridge Community UCC,

I pray this message finds you well.

As I write this message, the church calendar is about to turn to Advent, the season of waiting. During this time we are remembering our ancestors in faith who waited for the coming of the Christ even as we acknowledge that we are waiting to encounter Christ in a new way in our own lives. While the world might be playing Christmas music already, as Christians, we are called to be quiet and prepared as we watch for signs of Christ.

And that is incredibly important work for us to be doing right now. The world needs us to observe Advent thoughtfully and not succumb to the temptation to simply jump to Christmas. There are so many places, so many news sources, so many people frantically pointing out all of harm that people are doing, all of the dangers, all of the ways that this world is struggling in its brokenness right now that all of creation needs the faithful to be attentive to the signs of Christ's presence.

During worship on Sunday (November 22nd) I had four church members stand and read several scriptures aloud from where they were in the pews and choir loft. The readings came from all over the church and all over the Bible. The theme was “Do not fear.” The lesson from those verses is not that we should be in denial of all that is going on. Far from it. Denial would be to immerse one's self into the forced merriment and consumerism of the world's version of Christmas. Instead, these verses are about receiving God's Spirit of peace that *transcends* fear.

Because, when we are overcome by fear we are not able to discern God's presence and work. When we are overcome by fear we are not able to make wise decisions. When we are overcome by fear, we are certainly unable to follow Christ's commands to love our neighbors as ourselves, to work for the needy and the oppressed, and to love our enemies and pray for those who persecute us. Fear has no room for such things. That is why fear is so successful at pulling people from following Christ's path and so quick to spiral out of control.

So this Advent season I want to encourage in your prayer life. Take time for prayer. Take time to silently pray and listen for the ways God is calling you to live and act in this pivotal time. Pray to give thanks for the signs of Christ you see all around you. Pray for a world in need.

The first Sunday in Advent we declare Christ to be the hope of the world. With so many people encouraging (and profiting off) our fear and telling us everything going wrong, that message of hope is something people need to hear as desperately as ever. If we aren't the ones to share it, who will?

May God truly work through us this Advent season so that all can see God's light in our world.

God's grace and peace *truly and powerfully* be with you all,

Pastor Shaun