

## ***That's How the Light Gets In***

A sermon shared with the congregation of St. Andrew's United Church

November 29, 2020 – Advent 1

by Rev. Dave Le Grand

These are challenging times, aren't they? Groundhog Day continues, and very well might for awhile yet. That sense of one day feeling like the next. We go to the post office for an adventure, almost forget our mask. Perhaps the grocery store. We come to gatherings like this and we long to hug, see one another's face, but we cannot. All this *if* we even feel safe to leave home!

Strange has become the new normal. Add to this modern lament, our regular trials and tribulations of life; health issues; we lose a friend, small celebration of life, or none at all. *Where is God in all this*, comes the theological question. Left to our own devices, our opinions become entrenched. Don't they? We become armchair pundits, quarantined at home –

“What ignorant people, those masses of people gathering without masks!”

“What ridiculous thing is that political leader going to do now?”

Personal grace in us can be strained when we are isolated. God, you are with us, aren't you? Aren't you? We wish we could have a burning bush, or angel appearing to reassure us.

It made me think of the iconic song by Leonard Cohen, *Anthem*, described as like a beam of light, even if a sliver, during dark passages of time. Cohen sings his note defiant hope:

Ring the bells...that still can ring

Forget your perfect offering

There is a crack in everything (there is a crack in everything)

That's how the light gets in. <sup>1</sup>

Can we not relate to Isaiah and God's children of Israel who have lived in captivity and exile for years, but now returning; returning, though, to Jerusalem demolished. Temple crumbled to the ground. Keeping hope amidst the debris of our lives, is not easy.

This is no Hallmark Christmas movie plot line. But it is a spiritual journey we need to make, like Mary and Joseph on their harrowing hike to Bethlehem. Author Parker J. Palmer reflects on these lines from Madeleine L'Engle's Christmas poem:

“This is no time for a child to be born...

Yet Love still takes the risk of birth.”

“As we celebrate birthing & turning,” Palmer muses, “two of life's great movements ... In the face of all the risks, what wants & waits to be born in & through my life?” <sup>2</sup>

That is an Advent question for followers of Jesus, for spiritual questers, for anyone who yearns to be authentic. Can we risk acknowledging what waits to be born in our lives today? Especially as we step gingerly through the alleys and along sidewalks downtown

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<sup>1</sup> “Anthem”, composer Leonard Cohen.

<sup>2</sup> A December 10, 2010 post on Parker J. Palmer's Facebook page

to arrive at worship here on Sundays. A struggle to survive rages defiantly day and night just outside this church.

My comfortable clicker that opens the building garage door is not working at the moment. I have to get out, and to open the door manually. I see a face with hardship etched on it looking at me suspiciously. I say hello, and ask how they are doing.

The response, "I'm doing well, thank you." I'm certain that there is much more to her story, but life propels me on, drive into the garage. Life tends to propel us past these moments of connection. But does Advent not call us to pay attention to the details. It asks: *What is waiting to, longing to be born in us today?*

How many times are you feeling broken, like fragile pottery? I remember a study leader bringing in a ceramic mug, cracked. She observed that like this mug, she brings brokenness. Marks of character, resilience, and if we hold onto hope, empathy for all people, including those who are hard to care for.

*There's a crack in everything...that's how the light gets in.* And, if I might add a line – *that's how the light **gets out** too.*

On the screen is a photo I took when I was working as an Ecumenical Accompanier in Palestine and Israel. It was by accident that I visited this Palestinian home. This brother and sister greeted me with their parents outside of Bethlehem in the West Bank; father is a carpenter working with olive wood, mother is a nurse at the children's hospital in Bethlehem.

They told me the story of how one day the Israeli military, without warning, built a pillbox atop the hill beside their home. Every so often snipers would take a shot, not to hit them, but to scare them – let them know they were there. Imagine what that would be like, day after day, leaving your home is a harrowing act! It can embitter you. Life can program us to be fearful, propel us insulate ourselves, to demonize those we do not understand.

My Palestinian hosts continued their story. One day, with no fanfare, no notice left on their door, the pillbox became quiet. They watched, looking up each day, to see any signs of life. No sounds. They finally journeyed up there.

The military installation was abandoned. It now serves as a cool fort for the kids. In these trying times, faith calls us to walk in hope. If only we could hear holy voices, or witness burning bushes. Truth is, as we struggle, as we stumble through life's shadows, our character, our faith, our sense of hope and compassion are tested. We can feel bitter, angry. That's natural. What is more challenging is to remember who we are, *whose* we are. We are God's children.

Children of a God who, under the oppression of Roman empire, God chose to risk being born, a defenseless infant, to a 14-year-old unmarried girl. An unbelievable Saviour story. But there it is; **our** faith story.

God, the potter, is always creating, always working in and through us – don't ever doubt that! Especially through your brokenness, yours and my broken hearts in response to tragedy, injustice, need around us. That is when we shine with God's love most – *through the cracks in us, that's how light gets in, and out.*