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+Advent II Year C

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Choose to be an Advent People

Every morning we all wake up. Go through the motions, and every night we lay our heads back on our pillows and go to sleep.

And again we wake up, do the same exact thing, and return back to our homes.

And sometimes there are mornings that it is easy to wake up. Easy to just pop out of bed, eat breakfast, go to work, talk to coworkers and friends, eat dinner and go back to sleep.

And then there are times when it isn't easy. Where waking up seems to be laborious and heavy. When every part of your body is pulling you back into the warmth of the covers, and that coffee seems to be the only thing giving you life to function.

I actually keep a post it note next to my bed with a quote.

"In order for dreams to come true, one must first wake up" by Anonymous

I love to sleep as much as the next person, but God's not calling me to sleep, but to rise in the morning and make the most of my days. Because it is a gift. A divine gift of life.

For some people waking up comes easily, and to some it does not. but each day we choose to arise and show up.

So I want to talk about Choice. See, we makes hundreds of little choices every day, hundreds of decisions that have a ripple effect on people, our workplaces, our families, our hopes and dreams. We make hundreds of little choices and we learn about who we are from them.

So I want us to think about a choice that we have as Christians. We choose to be an Advent people. I am not standing up here telling you that you have to be an Advent person. But I'd like you to think about what it means to *choose* to be an Advent person.

It takes on a different meaning doesn't it? Choosing to do something as powerful as hope--well doesn't it ignite something deep inside?

When we choose to love another person our world blossoms with seeing everything in a whole new light.

When we choose to take care of someone who needs our help --we get back more than we could have given to them.

When we choose to hate another person- then we learn of the darkness that dwells within us all. And when we choose violence, abuse, corruption ...then we learn of the sin that permeates all aspects of our society.

We become what we choose.

So I ask us to think about what it means to choose to be an Advent people. If we really are what we choose, and what we buy, what we eat, and read, and watch, and love...then why can't we also choose to be an Advent People?

In Advent we hope, we watch, we wait...we are given a reason for all of these. The coming Christ will be born soon in a manger, bringing new life, bringing the incarnate God into our midst.

Each week we light another candle on the wreath as we approach Christ's birth. We add another light for the one who illumines the darkness. The one who we choose to believe in, and put our hope in: Emmanuel, Christ with us.

Even though the Word Made Flesh entered into the world as a baby 2000 years ago, we are still waiting, we are still hoping, because the world is not as it should be yet.

We are called to prepare the way, just as John the Baptist proclaimed from the wilderness. Our mountains are not yet made low, our valleys and roads are not yet made straight, there is work to be done yet...but we can't do that work unless we choose to hope...hope for the coming of Christ, who makes all things new.

Choosing hope isn't always easy. It can be hard. The world we live in can make our hope a whisper. A faint flickering light.

I've woken up the past few morning singing a song from my ancestors. ...

Now this song goes way back. Back in time when people, sold and bought other people to work as slaves.

And these slaves would get up early in the morning, they would work from dawn to dusk. They would work from the first moment that they could see, till the very last moment that they could see. Until it got too dark to work. And they called it working from **can't see to can't see**.

And they would be forced to work all day on things that didn't benefit them directly.

And if they didn't work hard enough they were whipped and tortured and treated badly. But even in the midst of their sorrow, even in the midst of their pain, they seemed to understand that if they woke up early in the morning, before their tasks had begun, and if they took time to pray, and concentrate on Jesus -they would be able to make it through a whole day.

With great hope that this day would be better than the last day.

*I woke up this morning with my mind
Stayed on Jesus
Hallelujah*

We can choose to be an Advent people: undaunted by difficulty, strengthened by hope, patient yet persistent, and sure in the promise and possibility of a better future, even when it is beyond our human knowing or imagination.

You see, hope isn't some denial of the realities of life. Hope is the desire that something good will happen in the future. But when we grip our hope in Jesus it changes everything.

You see Biblical hope not only desires something good for the future — it expects it to happen. And it not only expects it to happen — it is confident that it will happen.

When we put our hope in God, we put less meaning into what it is in our control, in our time, in our ways.

I choose to be an Advent People because quite frankly I need it.

I need to put my hope and trust in Jesus Christ. And I think other people want it too but aren't sure they want to name it. I've heard too many people tell me they are hopeless with what's happening in the world, too many posts on Facebook ranting about the grim and hopeless future.

It's intoxicatingly painful when we sit down and examine the way we treat people, the way we have treated our earth, the way we treat our own bodies...all of that is enough to keep me from wanting to get out of bed in the morning.

So why do I wake up? Because in order for dreams to come true one must first wake up.

And I can't do it alone.

My siblings in Christ, when the world becomes too heavy to carry by yourself, you let someone hold a little piece of it.

When you can't find the hope in your day because something in your life has just become too much to bear... you allow someone else hold it **with** you from time to time.

And when you realize that humans can't hold it all themselves then you turn and hand it over to God to hold.

Every pastor knows that each time you get called in to the hospital, you walk into some of the most painful and challenging situations you could imagine. And one of the heaviest and unspoken things that people turn and ask you to do is to hold on to hope for them. Even when they may not have it themselves.

And I'm making an assumption here, but I'm pretty sure that every pastor has walked out of hospital rooms, and emergency rooms, and then hands that hope over to God, because even we can not carry it alone, and no one has to carry it alone. **None of us can carry the burdens of this world alone, my friends.**

And so we choose to be an Advent people because we have experienced the beautiful power of love, grace, and forgiveness.

The thing I like about John the Baptist in the wilderness is that he'd been living out in that wilderness for over thirty years. Preparing, learning, waiting, hoping ... knowing that at some point God was going to use God's messenger.

But John's story isn't about the wilderness and it's not even about John. It's about God. God coming to us in Jesus. To restore, to heal, to bring the fullness of God's kingdom. And even though John lived in the wilderness for all those years, he chose to be an Advent people.

Hoping against all hope for God to come near.

We too are called to hope against all hope. Even when we know the horrors of this world.

Even when we know all too well the darkness of the day. Working from Can't See to Can't see...

God's kingdom will come.

Valleys will be filled.

Mountains will be made low

Paths made straight
Rough made smooth
And all flesh shall see the salvation of God.

This is what God has promised.
And God's promises always come true.
And that is why we Choose Hope.

Amen.