

## **“Make Way For Hope”**

Rev. David Gregory

December 6, 2020

Advent 2



*The Way by Cebarre*

### **Readings**

*Isaiah 40:3-4 from the Common English Bible*

A voice is crying out:

Clear a path in the desert!

Make a level highway in the wilderness for our God!

Every valley will be raised up, and every mountain and hill will be flattened.

Uneven ground will become level, and rough terrain a valley plain.

Alfred Delp in *Advent of the Heart*

Round about the horizon, the eternal realities stand silent in their age-old longing. There shines on them already the first mild light of the radiant fulfillment to come. From afar sound the first notes as of pipes and voices, not yet discernable as a song or melody. It is all far off still, and only just announced and foretold. But it is happening, today.

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Last week we lit our first Advent candle as a symbol of one of our deepest longings, and that is for peace among the nations of the world. But as we all know, world peace has yet to become anything but an elusive goal, and it will remain so at least until we can begin to find it within ourselves. As our friend and colleague Cameron Trimble said in a recent blog post, “The survival of our outer world depends on our ability to reconnect with our inner world.” Or as the old song says so simply and clearly, “Let there be peace on earth, and let it begin with me.” So our quest for peace this Advent season is not so much about what happens in the rest of the world. The first question is, “Where is my peace?” If we get enough people asking that question, we’ll find the shift occurring in the outer world as well. In the meantime . . . there is always hope.

Hope, mind you, is not the same thing as wishing. Hope carries a deeper level of expectation than that. It’s the recognition, not of something hypothetically possible, but of something that is definitely on its way. We just don’t have the ability to see it yet. A couple might wish to have a child, and for them it might be hypothetically possible, but hope means that there is a pregnancy. You might not be able to hold and see and touch the baby, but it is definitely on its way.

Many of us are familiar with the work of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, the German Protestant pastor who was tried and executed by the Nazis for his association with a plot to assassinate Hitler. His book *The Cost of Discipleship* is a twentieth century classic. Less well-known to us is the work of Albert Delp, a German Jesuit who met the same end for similar reasons. In his work entitled *Advent of the Heart* he wrote of “eternal realities” or ideals that may seem, by our definition, more wishful than hopeful. They “stand silent in their age-old longings,” he says. But these longings are expressions of a pregnant reality. In other words, there are signals that it is already happening.

Recently in our Thursday discussion group known as “Stone Soup,” we walked together down this fine line of wishing and hoping. Most of us struggle to maintain a sense of confidence in a world so dominated with pain, sickness, and loss. We sing the songs of the season and once again celebrate “peace on earth and mercy mild.” But where is the reconciliation? Where do the age-old longings enter our present experience? What is the point of singing and celebrating something that never seems to happen? Where is our sense of hope within this COVID fog we’re living in? We’ve been promised a vaccine, but it’s not here yet. We long to resume our normal daily lives, but instead we are again asked to stay home. We’ve come through a decisive election, but it’s yet to be fully recognized. Many of us have lost loved ones, and their public memorials are on hold. We are waiting, waiting, and waiting some more. Advent has become, quite literally, our season of “not yet.” We’re like the ancient Hebrews waiting to rebuild their temple. We’re like the Jews under the Roman occupation. When will it ever end?

We’re like the disenfranchised, being told that every vote matters only to be thwarted again and again in the quest to participate fully in a democracy that looks good on paper. But the protections, though better than they used to be, never seem to be fully realized. Even with all this, can we begin to hear a faint song in the distance? Can we detect the first mild light in the sky? Can we begin to clear a path in the desert and make a level highway in the wilderness? Can we find some hope in the evolutionary spiral that may not bring us all that was promised in our lifetime, but gives us just enough evidence to let us know we’re moving in the right direction?

As I have told you often, every time I look into the faces of my grandchildren, I find myself wanting to apologize for leaving them a world that is in such utter disarray. Our parents’ generation—some have called them the greatest generation—labored under an ideal that said, “I’m going to give you a better world than the one I found; I’m going to make sure you have all the opportunities I didn’t have.” And somehow we felt entitled to a world that was only going to get better. There would be a steady rise in our standard of living. New medicines would eradicate disease. More productive farming would eradicate hunger. Technological advancement would only make our lives more convenient. I think most of us would say by now that these hoped-for conditions are little more than a fairy tale. The evolutionary arc is far more gradual than that. Our parents were trying to give us a giant leap, when we really just needed to be prepared for the lessons of our own generation. We have our own adversities to overcome. We have our own mistakes to own up to. And . . . we have our own battles with authoritarianism which are helping us to find out what we are made of. So instead of looking at my grandkids with regret for all the things I could not do for them, I see in them a great hope for the future of humankind. I see in them the “first mild light of the radiant fulfillment to come.” In them I hear the “first notes of pipes and voices.”

As we contemplate our hope today, we remember the long list of Old Testament characters spoken of in New Testament Letter to the Hebrews, and how it says that they “all died in faith without having received the promises, but from a distance they saw and greeted them.” Hope, you see, is the gift of the very long view. It releases us from the bonds of our obsession with linear time and gives us a vision of something infinitely broader than our own experience. It brings us out of the narrow limitations of our individuality and brings us into the deep comfort of the collective consciousness. So in a very difficult Advent season, this is how we find our celebration of all that is “not yet,” by doing what every generation does. We rise and greet the promises from afar. We find every expression of them in the current moment, and as if planting tiny seeds in fertile soil, we cultivate the peaceful world we long to see.



*Pythagoreans' Hymn to the Rising Sun*  
Fedor Andreevich Bronnikov