

InVent: Create

Philippians 1:1-11

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In the words of Pastor Sam Yun describing this worship series:

"InVent is a three-week journey moving into and toward the Advent season, tapping into our God given gift of the creative spirit. It is recognition that we are created in the image of the Creator, and that when lived out to the fullest, we intentionally create, clear and commit to spaces of meaningful experiences and expectation of [Jesus]."

Advent is the beginning of the church liturgical year when we recall the centuries of waiting by Israel for its new messiah. It is a period of preparation for the Christmas celebration which begins on the 25th of December and goes through Epiphany on January 6. In Christmas, we find that new messiah born in a stable in Bethlehem; the one we call "the light of the world" (John 8:12); the one who makes his disciples "light to the world" (Matthew 5:14). Advent comes in the darkest time of year, paralleling winter solstice as we wait for the light that renews life itself. Advent is a time to ponder our own yearnings for God in our lives.

But, let's be honest. As soon as the kitchen is cleaned up from the Thanksgiving feast, the "real" Christmas season begins. We want to sing "Away in the Manger," "Hark the Herald Angels Sing," and "Joy to the World." We want the tree and the lights up as soon as possible and four weeks of "Jingle Bells" as we shop, buy and wrap presents for the big Christmas Day arrival of Santa. So much for Advent waiting.

In this "Year of Living Intentionally," what if we were to do Advent differently? What if, in the spirit Advent Conspiracy, we were to actually slow down and "Worship Fully, Spend Less, Give More, and Love All." This

InVent series is about preparing ourselves for a real Advent season and that would take some creativity wouldn't it?

How many of us have updated our Apple devices to the new Operating System? (Don't raise your hands!) Notice how all the apps now need updating as well? All of our gadgets need updating to keep them sharp and relevant to the amazing technological changes that seem to be occurring every day.

When was the last time we updated our faith? I meet with brilliant engineers and scientists in our community all the time, who are frustrated with, and seeking answers about, a spirituality which they feel is missing. They bring to the conversation a religion they learned as children in Sunday school years ago. They are shocked to learn that I don't believe that God is an old man with a beard in the sky either. They are surprised when I suggest that the story of Adam and Eve is poetry not history.

When was the last time we updated our faith? How much time and effort do we invest in deepening our faith, one of the discipleship practices? Why do we wait for disaster to arrive before we do?

In our epistle lesson this morning, the apostle Paul is writing to the church he founded in Philippi while awaiting trial; scholars debate whether it was during his imprisonments in Rome, Caesarea or Ephesus as Paul spent a lot of time in jail due to his faith. He speaks of "the good work" among them which is growing to "completion." He prays for them "that your love may overflow more and more with knowledge and full insight to help you to determine what is best...producing the harvest of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ...."

These words of gratitude and encouragement assume the constant presence of the spirit of God working to move the individual and community to greater depth of faith. John Wesley, founder of the Methodist movement, called this "sanctifying grace;" the grace that empowers us and shapes us to become the people God intends us to be.

Anne Lamott puts it this way; "I do not at all understand the mystery of grace, only that it meets us where we are but does not leave us where it

found us." (Five Practices of Fruitful Living, Schnase, Abingdon, 2011 p. 21).

We call God "Creator," as well we should, but the divine spirit is also "creating," in the future tense.

Consider: Process Theology is an obscure and intellectual contribution to the understanding of God. I am not a "Process theologian," but attending the Claremont School of Theology which houses the global Center for Process Studies, my own understanding of God has been influenced by Process concepts.

Based on the philosophy of Alfred North Whitehead (1861-1947) a brilliant English mathematician and physicist, contemporary theologians such as John Cobb and Marjorie Suchocki have applied Whitehead's insights to theology. They reject notions of God as an omnipotent, all-controlling power (causal agent) in favor of the God who in each and every moment nudges us to the best possibilities for life and love. God doesn't control the events in our life, the decisions we make, the results or challenges that come our way so much as influence us....lure us....to what is best. Expanding the notion of "free will," Process suggests that the choice is always ours. God's power - and it is powerful indeed - is not in dictating events so much as pushing us toward love, peace and justice in each one that comes our way.

Dr. Cobb describes the living Christ as the spirit of "creative transformation" (Christ in a Pluralistic Age, 1975). The spirit of Christ is found in each and every moment when the creative spark moves us into new and better possibilities for "loving and complex enjoyment".

As a potter, a preacher and a writer, I know this to be true. [photos of "Offering"]

A dear friend and I have been working on a collaboration ceramic sculpture for months now and what has come of it so far is nothing that either of us ever imagined. I could say that this piece came out of a moment of inspiration and dialogue, which is true, but its image and meaning was born out of relationship with clay as well.

Creative transformation moves us from the expected into new realms of possibility. I know this in my most significant relationships, certainly in my marriage. I would imagine that the software engineer or the high school teacher or the musician knows this moment when a creative spark inspires us beyond the present set of expectations into the possibilities of the future. It can happen in the middle of the night while we ponder a problem. It can happen in conversation with another. It can happen in a classroom of colleagues or a convention of fellow travelers. Moments come in life when all the parts and past come together and a new idea is born; and not just any idea but something for the good. We stand amazed that what is born is more than the sum of its parts, exceeding expectations and full of possibilities beyond our imagination. It is amazing....grace.

Cobb suggests that in moment like that, whether identified or not, Christ is present as we align ourselves with God's nudge toward a better life and world.

What if we were to open ourselves, families and friends to God's nudge for a creative Advent season? To break out of old holiday habits and create new ways and places for worship and faith will take intention.

Let's not wait until December 1st to start our preparation. Advent Conspiracy can be one way to do so. Go on-line and check out their resources for a new and creative Advent. Parents, pay attention to what your kids and youth bring home from church; our Christian Education program will be sharing some wonderful ideas. We don't have to do it alone. Our GroupLIFE Task Force will provide a focus for us as we prepare to prepare our hearts for the coming of Christmas.

Amen.