

# Advent 2014

## A Message from the Rector:

Dear friends, On a summertime visit to my sister in western Michigan many years ago we drove the kids to a local state park for a swim. They were young teens then. To our surprise we found ourselves to be in the midst of a Michigan Militia family picnic! On the tables in the pavillion lay, not barbecue and salads, but a startling display of weapons! As we spread our blankets near the lakeside, three pot-bellied men in camo trousers crunched across the sand in their jackboots. They stood at a distance with their arms folded surveying the crowd at the water's edge. Across their camo tee shirts was written the word "SECURITY"! Toni said to me, "I didn't feel the least bit insecure until they arrived." At one point it looked as if a trio of militia kids were going to try to pick a fight with my niece, but my own kids intervened and managed to talk the situation down. I have no idea what they said, but we were proud of them. Later they amused me by telling their uncle - who often scorned Camden - "We're glad we live in Camden and not in a place with people like that!"

Security is a word heard often nowadays. There is "national security" which is sometimes used as a cover to hide inconvenient facts or to violate someone else's rights. Then there is that notion of security which accompanies a sense of entitlement. People imagine they can pretty much do anything they like or go anywhere they please throwing caution to the wind. The assumption is that unpleasant things just do not happen here - or to me. You can hear that echoed in interviews with local people in neighborhoods where some nastiness has gone down. "We never suspected that such a thing could happen here. This is a good neighborhood." I'm sure that many, many people think of absolute security as a right.

People are susceptible. A general feeling of insecurity can be manipulated easily by those who want to dominate community or world affairs. If people can be made to feel they are threatened, they will almost eagerly submit to the will of anyone who offers a sense of security even if it's only an illusion. The threat may very well be exaggerated or even none existant. A classic example in recent times is the drummed up threat of "weapons of mass destruction" which led the majority of a nation to march off unquestioningly to a war in Iraq that has left more and bigger problems than it solved.

Security can be a double edged sword. As the jackbooted militiamen at Little John Lake in Michigan so well illustrated, one person's sense of security may come at the cost of another person's insecurity. In our American experience immigrants or racial minorities are often seen as threats. Laws are brought into being or actions taken which harm them or make their lives difficult. Many who believe that such actions are necessary for their security will chose not to notice. Someone else's discomfort is thought to be a small price to pay so that we might have a sense of well-being.

It was in the aftermath of the 9/11 attack on the World Trade Center that I first began to think seriously about security. It was perhaps one of the most serious attacks on the mainland of the United States. We were shaken. By the second month after the attack, many of us began to notice that some people seemed to be way too shaken - in some cases these were people who lived rather far from the northeastern states where the attack took place. This is when I began to realize that many people seemed to believe that they were entitled to live absolutely free of danger. That in itself may not be such a bad thing - though I think it's unrealistic - but it seems to encourage many to willingly sacrifice other peoples' security for the sake of their own.

When we stop to think about it, life can be a very frightening thing. We may take precautions. We may try to avoid "danger zones". We may do all the right things to cover ourselves. Still, disasters happen! The guy who enters the school classroom with murderous guns blazing may not be - probably is not - the immigrant or the minority person. He's the kid next door! ("We always thought this was such a quiet neighborhood.") Not all the horrors are done by other humans either. From California mud slides, to Florida sink holes, to raging forest fires, tsunamis and hurricanes name Sandy, disasters can sweep down upon us. What does one expect? We live on a terrestrial ball whose center is molten lava and which is hurtling around through an outer space loaded with asteroids and other debris! If you want to talk about insecurity, this is where we need to begin!

So why are Christian people told not to be afraid? That is, after all, a consistent theme in the Bible. If the world is dangerous, and if our efforts to find security are both futile and often harmful, why are we not shivering in our boots? At the heart of our Christian faith is a loving God. He loves us like a Father. It is God who has brought the whole universe into being. What is more, he has never ceased to love us and the whole Creation. As the Bible story unfolds, we are assured that God is involved with us every step of the way. Through Abraham and Sarah, through Isaac and Jacob, and through Joseph who was sold as a slave, God is present. It is God who sends Moses to bring his people from slavery to freedom. It is the loving Father who sends his Son to be born at Bethlehem. Through him a restored Creation- the Kingdom of God - is proclaimed and won, won on the hard wood of the Cross.

He has assured us that as God works for us, in us, and through us he is with us to the end of the age. Our Lord Jesus was no fool. He never told his disciples that life was to be so easy that we could live it without giving a single thought. He was well aware of the dangers that were out there. He spoke of wars and rumors of wars. He knew of earthquakes and floods and other disasters. He warned them - and us - of persecutions and suffering. These would come, he told his disciples - and still tells us today. They would come but when they do, don't panic. Don't lose your heads and do foolish and harmful things. **"So also, when you see these things taking place, you know that he [the Lord] is near, at the very gates..." (Mark 13:29)** He told us of God's kingdom and taught us to anticipate - wait for it. Not as we might wait for a train or a bus - unable to do much except be there. Jesus taught us to anticipate by our actions and our way of life. To face the unknown in the joy of the One who is known.

We are called to a Covenant life. We are to love God with all our heart, mind, soul, and strength, and to love our neighbor as ourselves. We are summoned to cast away the works of darkness and put on the armour of light. **"And the crowds asked [John the Baptist], 'What then should we do?' In reply he said to them, 'Whoever has two coats must share with anyone who has none; and whoever has food must do likewise.' Even tax-collectors came to be baptized, and they asked him, 'Teacher, what should we do?' He said to them, 'Collect no more than the amount prescribed for you.' Soldiers also asked him, 'And we, what should we do?' He said to them, 'Do not extort money from anyone by threats or false accusation, and be satisfied with your wages.'** (Luke 3:10-14) This is how we are to live in anticipation of the Kingdom. It's not complicated really. It's just fair play (Justice) and generosity (Compassion). Will life smack us in the face from time to time? Perhaps! Probably! But we have a Lord who is over all things. We have a hope in a Kingdom he has won for us.

What will happen in the future is, of course, unknown. However, people of the light have no real reason to fear and to feel insecure. Our God reigns over all! We can live secure in the midst of insecurity. It is this kind of fearless living that we are called to celebrate in Advent.

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