

Centre Street Congregational Church, UCC

December 19, 2021

Advent 4

"It'll Be Alright"

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Let us pray . . .

Holy One of All the Ages, may we have the courage to experience and hold truths found within Your ancient words. Saturate us with that unending truth, that our whole selves may be open to what is possible through love.

Amen

Today we lift up the Advent — or the coming — of love. Waiting and preparing is what the season of Advent is all about. While we wait, we light candles and we remember the story of God's promises embodied in human flesh. We also wait for Christ's return —whether we consider that a literal return or we look for evidence of the Holy's presence in the action of others and our own.

No matter how we come at Advent,
we wait.

Come to think of it, we wait for a lot of things across our lives, don't we?

We wait for our day to begin or to end.

We wait for iCloud to load and to be let into Zoom.

We wait for coffee to perk or dinner to be ready.

We wait for graduations, weddings, birthdays, and in-person worship.

We wait for funerals or test results from the doctor.

We wait for our schedules to give us breathing room.

We wait for time with family or friends.

We wait for Santa and snow.

We wait for the pandemic to end or at least the parts that keep us from moving about in the care-free ways we once did.

In so many ways, we do the hard work of waiting.

Sometimes the waiting is excruciating.

The hard work of waiting is where I've found myself for almost a year now. You see, the usual ways I had ordered and made sense of my world both externally and interiorly have been turned upside down as I move through the most difficult time I've ever known.

I'm waiting for relief from my suffering.

Between the pandemic, the death of my mom, and my personal inner work, nearly every way I'd made sense of life has been disturbed and disrupted. The net effect has been darkly disorienting.

Perhaps you can identify through your own painful disruptions — those dark places that you've either moved through or are presently

encountering — where it would seem that the only way through the difficult things is to wait for them to pass.

While we mostly don't know how Mary did while waiting for the birth of her baby — the other Gospels are silent on Mary's pregnancy — we know that in the moment of affirmation from her cousin Elizabeth, she waits in spontaneous joy, singing her magnificat, her song of praise to God for what God has done.

But prior to that moment, I wonder if Mary initially felt hopelessness when given the message that she would bring a savior into the world. After all, an angel appears and tells her not to be afraid. Talk about waiting and disorientation. Maybe in her private moments she wept in despair. And a pregnant, unwed women had no status in first century Palestine. She was at high risk for being cast out of society and even stoned to death. She must have had her dark night of the soul until that assurance from Elizabeth let her know that it would be alright.

As we heard Cindy read for us in verses 41 and 42:

41 When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the child leaped in her womb, and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit.

42 With a loud voice she blurted out, "God has blessed you above all women, and he has blessed the child you carry.

The experience of God's mighty Spirit conveys truth and Mary's praise for God pours out of her and in that moment she knows

It will be alright.

Isn't that precisely what we want to know when we are in dark and difficult places? Don't we also want to know that it will be alright?

The beauty of Mary's praise is in its reminder that no matter what we are faced with, *It will be alright*. Despite all that could be dark and dangerous for Mary, while waiting she sings of what God has already done, foreshadowing the ministry of Jesus and the coming Kingdom.

Pulpit Fiction reminds us that Mary links these things to what God *has done* —

51 He has shown strength with his arm. He has scattered those with arrogant thoughts and proud inclinations.

52 He has pulled the powerful down from their thrones and lifted up the lowly.

53 He has filled the hungry with good things and sent the rich away empty-handed, meaning, God is not *going* to turn the world upside down — in choosing

Jacob,

Moses,

Mary

God *continues* turning the world upside down.

Our lives are made up of moments and stories and we need all the parts to help move through and make sense of the whole. No one will come to understand this more than Mary because about 30 odd years later she will be gathered at the base of the cross helplessly watching her baby boy suffering an agonizing death.

And maybe the only way Mary can make any of that bearable is because she'll trust the same loving force that comforted her in the early days of her pregnancy.

Fred Craddick reminds us that to speak of what God has done is to announce what God will do. And here we are, 6 days from Christmas and still for many of you, there's the cursed waiting. And sometimes the tension of the waiting can be quite difficult and painful and God's silence can feel like abandonment.

But the other side of things being alright is a willingness to submit to the fact that there's so much that we don't know when it comes to the Divine — like why is God silent and what happens after we die and what mysteries lie deep below the surface where God and our souls do their private work? And who or what exactly is God? Despite all that we don't know, the point of recalling these sacred stories is to be reminded that God has done plenty — look at creation alone or the miraculous places in your life— and that God will continue to do — the work is never done. It'll be alright.

So Beloveds, I know many of you carry some heavy things on your hearts. Please believe me when I tell you it will be alright.

It will be alright not because of wishful or magical thinking but because God has this perplexing and Holy habit of having loved and continuing to love us through all difficulties. God never said believe in me and you'll live pain-free ever after. God said believe in my promises which essentially means there is a Holy presence into which you can lean.

As Christmas moves closer, my prayer is that you also lean into the same truth that moved Mary to song — and remember that in all that you are going through, no matter how painful, *it will be alright*. That's not a promise you have to wait for, like waiting through Advent — it's done. And ultimately? Whether you can buy into it or not, kinda doesn't matter because the decision has already been made. The news is good.

It will be alright.