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Dear Brothers and Sisters,

Always we begin in the dark. Not pitch-black, dead-of-night darkness, but Advent begins in a spiritual dusk from which the light of one candle on the wreath shines outward—a necessary, treasured reminder of the light that shines on in any darkness we find ourselves in. This light is like armor, a sure defense against the “works of darkness.”

We approach Advent and this new Church year still resurfacing, reconnecting, and finding our way back through this prolonged COVID pandemic. Life is getting so much closer to ordinary, with numbers moving in the right direction and vaccination rates increasing, including among younger children. Everywhere I’ve been in the Diocese of West Texas, people are so happy to be together, worshipping and doing ministry. We are in a better place than a year ago, even while understandable anxiety and frustrations linger. Nevertheless, we light our candle and trust that not even this present gloom will outlast the light that is coming into the world.

The Season of Advent’s arrival will likely stir longing in you for tranquility, simplicity, and deeper meaning. Perhaps you will see the miracles of hope, love, joy, peace, and the birth of Christ as if for the first time through the eyes of a child. Or you may feel too busy, or too tired, to notice anything different; your church’s practices and prayers, Scriptures and hymns may sound like the same old thing come November 28th.

But here’s what’s true: *you* are not the same as you were a year ago. Even without a pandemic, from year to year life’s events change us, both subtly and dramatically. Over the course of any twelve months, our story will include gains and losses, hopes and fears, unwanted changes and unexpected joys. As we watch, wait, and prepare during Advent this year, maybe we will see and hear truth that we could not see or hear last year.

Advent begins in the dark, drawing us to watch, wait and prepare. The season invites us to acknowledge where we are; to take an honest look at our condition and the fine messes we’ve got ourselves into; and to consider our inability to fix ourselves and our need for a Savior. We are called to thoughtfully and prayerfully slow down, making an honest inventory of the darkness.

Consider: “What is God up to in my life? What is God doing in my church, in my home? If Christ will come again in glory, where are the signs that keep hope alive? In a world where so much is so wrong, where sin and evil wreak havoc, where the innocent suffer at the hands of violent individuals and systems, how do I find God? If we light the candles and put on the armor of light, what then shall our churches do to let that light shine on those around us?”

And here we are, living in these between times — ordinary people in our 87 ordinary churches, called and empowered for this extraordinary and holy work of bearing the light of Christ into the world. True Christmas spirit does not pretend the darkness isn’t there, but lights that candle, straps on the armor of light, and steps out to care for those caught out in the dark, walking alongside them as Jesus the Light of the World does.

To anyone who has lost their way in this darkness, know that you have precious gifts to give. You have the light that shines on in the darkness. You have the hope that cannot be overcome. You have the good news that Christ will come, his Kingdom will prevail, and darkness will not last.

May Advent in your church, and in your life, become a time of light and peace, and may you become a bearer of light and peace. Let us watch and prepare together, with the unshakeable hope of those who await the dawning of the Son.

Love in Christ,

+David Reed
Bishop of West Texas

