

ADVENT 2020

*"The light shines in the darkness,
and the darkness has not overcome it." John 1:5*

CHRIST CHURCH | DARTMOUTH

November 29th 2020

"Hope makes you see God's guiding hand not only in the gentle and pleasant moments but also in the shadows of disappointment and darkness." -Henri Nouwen.

"We must move forward. But we don't know for sure what the new normal will be. Fortunately, God's rubric of love shows us the way." - Bishop Michael Curry

Dear Friends in Christ,

As I write this year's Advent letter, I recognize the stress, pain, and grief that many are experiencing at this time. This Advent and Christmas may be one of the darkest we can remember. Yet, amid the global COVID-19 pandemic, the church continues to live on, albeit differently. No longer can we shake hands at the door, gather for meals, or worship in the same way. Instead, online services and other methods of communication by phone, email, and social media have become the norm.

To date, 11 580 Canadians have died from COVID-19. Our nation is in a period of mourning, a time of lament. Currently, we are in a two-week lockdown as we try and get a handle on the virus. At this time, we are called to pray for all affected by this virus: doctors, nurses, care practitioners, scientists, government officials, clergy and laity, members of the retail industry, all essential workers, family and loved ones, and the souls of the dearly departed.

One might view darkness in the same way Jesus spoke of it. In Mark 13, our Lord says,

"In those days, after that suffering, the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will be falling from heaven, and the powers in the heavens will be shaken. Then they will see 'the Son of Man coming in clouds' with great power and glory."

This year our Advent theme is "Lighting the Darkness." Our worship will be shaped around weekly dramas that look at the Christian faith in light of the current pandemic. I hope that you will be able to join us in whichever manner is most comfortable for you.

As I mention the darkness, there is light. Our role in the community has not been reduced. In some ways, it has expanded. The Christ Church Food and Clothing Bank continues to serve roughly 75 clients a week (this is an increase). This Christmas season, we will safely provide 110 Christmas Hampers to people in our community. We have also made adjustments so community groups can use our space safely for their events. There are online Christian education opportunities, and we continue the critical pastoral ministry as we reach out to the sick and the lonely in new and innovative ways.

However, we can't help but recognize that our sense of community has changed. Change is hard. This change has, I'm sure, been difficult for you and your family. It has been particularly difficult for clergy, staff, wardens, parish council, volunteers, and the parishioners of our beloved parish. Yet, we move forward. We still proclaim the gospel! For it is our baptismal promise to "seek and serve Christ in all persons, as we love thy neighbour as thyself," and we "strive for justice and peace among all people, and respect the dignity of every human being."

Even as we change, we can look to our past and see how today's events are mirrored in history. In Steven Laffoley's novel *A Halifax Christmas Carol*, the protagonist Michael Bell faces the hardships of returning from The Great War. In December 1918, Michael works at *The Halifax Herald* and is tasked with finding a missing boy—Tommy Suklis, before the paper's Christmas Eve edition is published. Laffoley describes our city in a state of hopelessness. He reflects on the darkness, and an era of disease, brokenness and poverty, writing

Now by "the darkness," I don't mean the absence of light—though, in truth, it did seem at times as if everything was coloured in shades of grey and black. No, by "the darkness," I mean something far worse. I mean the absence of hope.

Yet, the story is filled with hope. The young boy who is lost is found, and he reveals to Michael and a cast of characters what life is really about. This tale, inspired by a true story, mirrors what we are waiting for—a child. Laffoley opens his book, writing, "...and a little child shall lead them." Isaiah 11:6. That is where we are—a period of darkness that leads to the light.

This Christmas will be very different from the ones of the past. The traditional family gatherings will be limited in number, and our ability to move freely in our neighbourhoods may not be feasible. Yet, in many ways, this Christmas will be like the very first one, simple. A small gathering, with few in attendance. A mother and father destitute, with no place to find shelter, except for a lowly barn. A young child, born into poverty as a refugee in a new land. A Saviour who turned the world upside down and loved humanity with compassion that knew no borders and a love that was not confined by walls.

As you gather safely, I pray that you are reminded of the first Christmas and how simple it was. How void of tradition, pageantry, and specific celebration. Perhaps God is telling us something? Maybe God is proclaiming: "It's about my Son." Indeed it is. It's about following the star, for only in the darkness can we see the light!

May God bless you and yours as we Lighten the Darkness!

Yours faithfully in Hope, Peace, Joy, and Love,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Kyle Wagner". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

The Rev. Dr. Kyle Wagner
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