Advent Conspiracy: Spend Less, Give More
Sermon given by Rev. Patricia Farris

Isaiah 11:1-10
A shoot shall come out from the stump of Jesse, and a branch shall grow out of his roots. The spirit of the Lord shall rest on him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord. His delight shall be in the fear of the Lord. He shall not judge by what his eyes see, or decide by what his ears hear; but with righteousness he shall judge the poor, and decide with equity for the meek of the earth; he shall strike the earth with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips he shall kill the wicked. Righteousness shall be the belt around his waist, and faithfulness the belt around his loins. The wolf shall live with the lamb, the leopard shall lie down with the kid, the calf and the lion and the fatling together, and a little child shall lead them. The cow and the bear shall graze, their young shall lie down together; and the lion shall eat straw like the ox. The nursing child shall play over the hole of the asp, and the weaned child shall put its hand on the adder’s den. They will not hurt or destroy on all my holy mountain; for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea.

On that day the root of Jesse shall stand as a signal to the peoples; the nations shall inquire of him, and his dwelling shall be glorious.

We are grateful to Robert for opening our Advent worship this year by introducing the themes of our “Advent Conspiracy.” While I was really glad to be in Phoenix last Sunday to spend the Thanksgiving weekend with David and my Mom, I truly missed worship with you on the first Sunday in Advent. This is my favorite season of the church year, this time of preparation and wonder, this season of waiting and hoping, these days of holding fast to God’s promise of new life and of a world made new.

As Robert explained, the Advent Conspiracy program grew out of a group of churches who got together to conspire to “let Advent be Advent,” if you will, to let this season be a time to go deeper, to make space within our hearts for the mystery and power of the coming of the Christ Child to fill us with hope, and joy and love and peace. In these four weeks we conspire together to worship fully, to spend less and to give more, and to love all.

Haven’t we all had the experience at one time or another of waking up the day after Christmas feeling like we’d missed it? That somehow amidst all the hectic pace of shopping, and parties, and cooking and cleaning, and decorating, and travel, and house guests, we’d sped on fast forward right past the true purpose of it all? Feeling more stressed than renewed? More empty than full? More poor than rich? Instead, what if we conspire together, in this community of faith, to experience Advent in a different way this year? To invest in life-giving practices, to live out of a spirituality of true hope and joy, that grounds us in the miracle of this holy birth, when “love still risks to be born.”
God’s great gift to us all is a rich and meaningful life through the amazing grace of love and to the world, the fulfillment of righteousness, justice and peace as foretold by the prophets and made incarnate in Christ Jesus. Let’s conspire, church, to make our hearts and minds and souls ready to receive these awesome gifts.


Week 1 focused on what it means to worship fully, to leave it all on the field, as Robert said. To bring all of who we are to all that God brings to these moments of worship each week that we might be full of the awe and love of God, and through us, the world transformed. Week 2: spend less, give more.

This is not an easy one, for we are up against a wily foe. We are constantly being seduced by the best ads money can buy into believing that love can be bought by presents, that value can be demonstrated by expensive things, that Christmas is about buying things we can’t really afford to prove our love and demonstrate our generosity.

The simple invitation to “spend less” is an invitation into an alternative value-system, a different way of measuring our self-worth and of expressing our feelings about those we love most. It’s an invitation into the spirit of Christ, this new messiah who, the prophet proclaims, will embody for us God’s own “spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord which shall be his delight. This is the One who shall not judge by what his eyes see or his ears hear; but with righteousness shall judge the poor and decide with equity for the meek of the earth.”

This is the One whose birth we await, the One for whom we prepare room in our hearts. Spend less, to make space in the manger of your soul for Emmanuel, God-with-us.

Give more. Give more of yourself, in the manner of our Savior. Give of your love, your talents, your joys, your passion. Give more. Tutor a child at Family Place. Spend more time with your family—in person or on the phone or through Skype or however you do it. Give more. Email me and ask me for the name of someone who would be delighted to find a poinsettia or a box of Christmas cookies or the CD of this morning’s worship service at their door accompanied by your smiling, loving face. Join our mighty crew down on the Palisades next Saturday morning to put up our FUMC Nativity scene that delights thousands of visitors each Christmas as it tells the story of Jesus’ birth. Take a couple hours out to give back, to give more.

Here’s another idea. Give in ways that multiply your gift, change lives and transform the world. Give in ways that send hope to those in need. I’m so proud—I think justifiably so—that our congregation has for years nurtured us in this kind of giving. Third-World Hand Arts, the United Methodist Women’s Boutique with proceeds going to mission, Angel Tree for kids at Family Place, and of course, Alternative Christmas which starts today, affording you the opportunity to give a gift in the name of someone you love to support any one of 12 local and global mission projects.
Need more ideas? Call me. I can connect you with a starving student, a woman in Mozambique who needs an insecticide-treated bed net, a senior eager for a new hearing aid, a prisoner dying for a book to read. Give more.

For in the reign of our new king, the Psalmist sings, the mountains yield prosperity for the people and the hills righteousness. This new king defends the cause of the poor and brings deliverance to the needy. This king will live while the sun endures and as long as the moon, throughout all generations. In his reign, justice will flourish and peace abound.

Do you feel the abundance in all that imagery, the extravagance of God’s promise, the surfeit of good things for the earth and for us all? Become a part of that kingdom here and now. Give more of the gifts God sends in and through Christ Jesus that his love might extend into every place of want and his light illumine the darkness anywhere.

This morning we are privileged to come to the table of love and grace, the feast of righteousness and reconciliation, the table of our Lord Jesus Christ. Through the most simple of gifts--grain of the fields, fruit of the vine--we participate in the saving, healing, empowering gift of Emmanuel, God-with-us. People of God, worship fully. Lay it all on the altar of God’s love. Spend less and make room in your soul for the priceless gift of mercy and grace. Give more and let your life expand into limitless generosity, growing more like Christ each day, that in us and through us the glory of God may fill the earth with hope and peace.

Notes:

© Patricia Farris, 2010. Permission is given for brief quotation with attribution. All other rights reserved.