

AIDS, ADVENT & ARCHITECTURE
December 3, 2017
The Reverend Bill Clark

AIDS, Advent and Architecture.

I call this the A sermon. I mean what do these three words have in common besides the bountiful beauty of some seemingly senseless awkward alliteration. I must confess I do have this habitual haphazard habit of creating carefully constructive sentence structures, which may string together a wanton wide wheel of words that may leave you shouting...boldly and bravely...Bill...enough.enough.enough!

And yet today's sermon is not about words. Per se. Well actually it is about one word. The one word that brings the "A" sermon title together. The one word that places these three seemingly divergent topics under one roof....or in one sanctuary. That word is hope. AIDS, Advent and Architecture is about hope.

The Reverend William Sloan Coffin states, "Hope arouses as nothing else can arouse, a passion for the possible." Today we celebrate the passion for the possible. Today we celebrate hope.

Friday, December 1st was World AIDS Day. The World Health Organization established this day in 1988. It was established after a summit of health ministers from around the world called for a spirit of social tolerance and greater exchanges of information on HIV/AIDS. Many of you know the impact that AIDS has had on my life. I have lost far too many friends to this disease. Much of my early work in the ministry was centered on AIDS Ministry. And yet much has happened since that first World AIDS Day in 1988.

It seems ironic that I am able to stand before you today and talk not about the grief and loss around HIV/AIDS, but rather around hope and the passion for the possible in living with HIV/AIDS. Just that phrase living with AIDS is wrought with hope. Because, yes today in the year 2017 people are living with AIDS. The medical breakthrough over the years and the development of the protease inhibitors cocktails offer staggering statistics on the life span of those living with AIDS.

I have friends who were literally on the brink of death, rebound and now face a newfound life. A life they never expected to live. Friends have returned to the work force, gone back to college, dared to dream and think about a future. "Hope," according to Latin American activist, Ruben Alvez,

“is hearing the melody of the future.” Many are hearing that melody. Many are living, no longer with AIDS, but with hope.

It is wonderful to talk about hope in a connection to a disease that seemed so terrifying and tragic just a few years back. And yet this hope has come with a price. Millions have died. Millions have marched. Millions have demanded research and funding. And the marches continue for the battle has yet to be won. The rates of infections are once again on the rise. Marginalized groups and impoverished nations are facing extremely high rates of mortality. And yet hope remains. For hope is not standing by and idling waiting for things to change. Hope is standing up for an ideal, for education, for medications, for further research with courage and striking out against injustice and sending out those tiny ripples.

This World AIDS Day 2017 we are the recipient of those ripples of hope and energy as we stand together and say there is more hope somewhere. Medical advances have brought us to this point. “Hope,” in the words of Czech playwright Vaclav Havel, is “a dimension of the spirit. It is not outside us but within us.” If there is hope for those living with HIV/AIDS there is hope for those living with cancer, diabetes and Alzheimer’s as well. It is a hope not out there. But right here...within us...deep, deep within us. There is more hope somewhere. There is. There is more hope....And we’re going to

hang on till we find it, a hope for a cure, a hope for equity in medical availability, and a hope for a reduction of further infections. There is more hope somewhere.... For this is the season of hope.

Advent.

Today is the first Sunday of Advent. The word advent means a coming or arrival. The first Sunday leading up to the arrival of Christmas. Christmas for many marks the birth of a new hope in the world.

Now I always associate advent with calendars. I love advent calendars. The day after Thanksgiving my sister and I used to venture out to the local toy store to buy our collection of advent calendars. They came in all sizes and designs. Some had religious themes. Others were entirely secular. Some had clever sayings behind each window. Others just a picture. Today's calendars seem to come complete with little sweets and candies as well. The fun was finding the windows for each day in December and counting down how many days till Christmas! Advent calendars are a visual way of reminding us just how many days remain until December 25th. I always prefer this method of counting down the arrival of Christmas than the newspapers bold numbers printed in the corners in clever red and green design of ten shopping days till Christmas.

For advent is not about how many shopping days are have left to go out and buy that CD, bike, bracelet, game boy, Nintendo, computer, car or sweater. Advent is not about shopping! Christmas, believe it or not is not about shopping. Advent is about the coming of hope. Christmas is the birth of hope.

The birth of Jesus, symbolically celebrated on December 25th heralded in the arrival of a new hope for the world. Now this hope was not a Christian hope or a Jewish hope or a Hindu hope or a Buddhist hope. It does not apply to only those who choose to belief in Jesus as a savior or seerer. It is a hope for the entire world. No matter what your theological take on the man Jesus his historical arrival changed the world. His teachings and gospel of love was a radical new approach to life. Jesus was a revolutionary. They killed him because he was a radical revolutionary. He stood up for his ideals of love and compassion. He sought to improve the lives of others. He spoke out against injustice. Jesus offered hope, a brand new hope, to a people and to a world full of despair.

This is what we honor in this season of advent. We honor and we wait with joyous anticipation the re-birth of this hope. A hope that says yes, we can live by love alone. Yes, we can stand up together and face the injustices of

poverty, racism, and oppression. Yes, we can love our enemies, love them and forgive them and live together in that hope of a better world.

Look around you, my friends. That hope is coming. I can feel it. I can hear it. I can see it. I see it in the houses wildly adorned with festive lights and decorations. They say look here. Hope is coming. I can see it in the store windows and the faces of the people. They cry out. Look hope is coming! I can hear it in the caroling and holiday music that abounds, it sings out come rejoice, rejoice, Emmanuel, shall come within as Love, Truth, Light, Hope, to dwell!

It's coming, my friends. It's coming! More hope is coming. And I'm going to hang because hope is coming!

Architecture.

We are all architects. I never thought of life quite that way before. And yet I think it is true. We are all architects of our lives design. In that same way we are all architects of the hopes we have for our lives design. In this season of advent my questions to you are a simple ones. What does hope look like in your lives design? What do you hope for in your life? Swiss theologian Emil Bruner wrote, "What oxygen is to the lungs, such is hope to the meaning of life."

So in asking what does hope look like in your lives design, I realize I raise the question what gives your life meaning? For to find meaning in our lives is to find the hope that helps to get us up, get us out and get us ready to face each new day. If this new day is faced with illness and disease, what does hope look like to you? If this new day is faced with grief and loss, where is the hope to hang on to? If this new day is faced with mundane meetings and monotony, where is your living in hope?

“Hope is a hungry thing,” writes Washington Post columnist, Elizabeth Kastor, “as easily fed by wishful thinking as by certainties.”

There are some certainties in this life. There is the certainty that we will know moments of happiness. The certainty that we will face sorrow and illness grief and loss. And there is much wishful thinking as well. A wish for the end of AIDS, a cure for cancer and true peace on earth. And in between the wishing and the certainties there lies a space. This is the space of hope. Now to live in this space of hope, this space between wishful thinking and certainties requires movement. It requires movement of our hands to reach out and hold on. It asks of us to turn and meet one another, face to face. And it asks of us movement to pull together into that space where we can live in hope. This description, I realize, is what I call an architectural design for hope.

As is typical for me I got the blueprint for this design from my second language, ASL.

The sign for hope is this: (*HOPE*) In breaking this sign down I get a true blueprint of what hope looks like.

First hope requires two hands. Hope is not merely wishful thinking. It asked of us participation and movement. Hope asks us to offer our hands. HOPE!

Second, hope requires our eyes to be open and our head to look up. “Now when you see these things begin to take place, stand up and raise your heads....”, Luke tells in the reading for advent. Hope asks us to keep our eyes open and our head up to see the passion for the possible.

And third, hope requires our hands to face one another. Just as we must stand face-to-face, eye-to-eye, heart to heart, connected in hope.

This is my architectural design of hope. It requires our hands to offer hope. It requires our head and eyes to see hope and it requires face-to-face, heart to heart connections to live in hope. Hope requires my hands, my head and heart.

What does hope look like to you? Does it require movement? Does it involve your hands or heart?

What do you hope for in the design of your life? Is it a million dollars? Financial security? Health, Peace? Author, Barbara Kingsolver, writes in her

book *Animal Dreams*, “The very least you can do in your life is figure out what you hope for. And the most you can do is live in that hope.”

Living in hope. To live in that space between wishful thinking and certainties. Kingsolver goes on in her book to add, “What I want is so simple I almost can’t say it: elementary kindness.”

What do you hope for in your life? What do you hope for in your personal life, your professional life, in your congregational life? What does this hope require of you? Where does your hope come from?

My friends, in this season of advent, as we await the birth of that new hope may we examine the architectural plan of our lives design and find that sacred space where may live in hope. There is always more hope somewhere. Hope, hearing the melody of the future. May your future be filled with elementary kindness, peace and harmony.

Blessed Be