

***Advent 1 Reflection  
Welcoming Something New  
Isaiah 35:1-6  
Preached by Rev. Jessica McCrae  
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What would it mean for the words of Isaiah to come to life for you?

What would it mean, in your life, in our world, for deserts to bloom, weak hands to be strengthened, weak knees made firm? What would it mean for the eyes of the blind to be opened, for those who don't hear, to hear?

What would it mean for communities who have gone so long without, communities filled with violence, poverty, or lack of opportunity to become places of hope? Places where the skills and gifts of all are upheld? Where the value of every person is recognized and honoured? Where children's hearts are filled with hope and energy for tomorrow and their bellies and their minds are fed? What would it mean for joy to fill every heart – for deserts, dry barren places of our hearts, our world, to bloom with joy, colour, imagination and hope?

What would it mean if the aching parts of your body, your mind, your heart were strengthened, soothed? If you knew that the journey ahead was yours to make without worry about your health, your stamina, your resolve. If the fear you harbour over money, your future, your family's future, this pandemic, any of the numerous things we fear just ... dissolved. What if someone could just look you in the eye and say, "Be strong, do not fear. All of this, all of this is going to be ok. We're going to be ok. You will be ok." What if someone spoke those words of reassurance to you and it was ok, you were ok, your fear was gone, replaced with hope and joy?

What would it mean in our world if those who are blind to the poverty and suffering of so many, were able to see, and care, and respond? What would it mean for our world, for all of us, if those who refuse to hear the cries of the oppressed and the hurting opened their ears, and their minds and care, and responded, and loved. What would it mean if those without a voice in our world – oppressed young girls and women, indigenous communities, those in long term care homes, those

with mental and physical challenges, the ones who have been denied education, who make their home on the street, who toil as slaves for an economy that never lets them get ahead, what if they had reason to sing out with joy? What if light shone upon them all and they were filled with such hope that this world was going to become a just and equitable place for us all, that they could not help but sing out with joy. What if that hope, that certain knowledge that the world was changing in good and positive ways flowed with the strength of water bursting the banks of dried up streams, what if that hope, that positive change was unstoppable?

What if that all happened?

What will it be like when it does?

Because this, all of this hope is coming to pass. All of this hope is springing to life in this world.

What if you could believe this is true?

Where would you pray that it brought change?

Where do you need change?

What fear would you extinguish?

Why can't it be true? Why can't we work with God to make it true?

In 6 beautiful verses the prophet Isaiah articulates the hope that comes with this Advent season. The hope that the coming of God will bring true change, that our lives and our world will come in line with all that it is that God calls us to be. And hearing these words during this pandemic time, when fear is so strong and the inequalities in our society are so pronounced, is like hearing them for the first time. Because we are hungry for change, we are hungry for hope.

Advent is about remembering the excitement and anticipation of God's people when they first heard these words of promise, and feeling it again today. It is about looking at our own lives and identifying where we are in need of hope, of joy, of a voice promising transformation and healing. It is about

seeing where chains can be loosened and hope can be born. And it is about seeing our place in this unfolding narrative of hope – seeing where we can make room for the love of God to take root, where we can make changes, where we need to rearrange the furniture, our ideas, our priorities, so that this baby, this Christ child can grow in our lives, grow to bring change, to shake the world, to shake our corner of the world, so that every fear falls away and we can not help but sing.

It is about feeling this hope, this need and believing in its power, believing that this world can be transformed with the power of God. And it is about helping to make it so.

Advent is about welcoming something new. It is about welcoming the baby who will be born, but it is also about welcoming everything that baby is about, and everything that baby will become.

It is about knowing God is with us.

And living like we believe it.

It is about welcoming hope, and new life, and radical change; believing that this world can be different, and that we can, with God's energy and love, help to make it different.

It is about believing that these powerful prophecies are coming to pass. Knowing that God wants to break into our world, and is breaking into our world, bringing something new:

new hope

new ways of understanding our world

new ways of knowing God

new ways of being in relationship with each other

new joy.

It is about a new tomorrow.

Are you ready to welcome it?

Are you ready to see yourself in the midst of this message of hope being proclaimed?

Things can be different. Things will be different.

Let's welcome these new things with hope.

Be strong. Do not fear. The one we have been waiting for is coming. Amen.