



My Friends in Christ,

Advent is now upon us as we once again prepare our hearts for the coming of Jesus the Christ. There are typically many expectations of this time of year. We expect to be seeing friends and loved ones. We expect to have family gatherings and shared meals. We expect to be gathered in church as a worshipping community. We expect at some point that the joy of the season will catch up with the tasks and busyness that traditionally fill this time. Advent and Christmas are typically times of big joys, celebrated in big ways. Chances

are that things may look a bit different this time around.

Given the strange holding pattern we are in right now, how do we readjust our bearings, much less our expectations? Our typical expectations of this season are not likely to apply to what is delivered. There is no doubt that the reality may be smaller, quieter, and differently paced than in years past. And though our rhythms and long-held patterns may be different, it is my fervent hope and prayer that we can find ways to cling to the spirit of our celebrations, and not the manner or size of them.

People often say, "Count your blessings." This is a good chunk of advice, though typically we have so many that are evident that we get part-way through our list, realise we are blessed and move on. But it is also good advice for times like these, where blessings may seem smaller, closer to home, or obscured by the changes and chances of the world around us. The upside to the events we are living through may be that our blessings, the things that truly matter the most, are easier to count, either for their presence or by their absence. Much of the work of Advent, like the season of Lent, is actually stripping away the trappings to get to the reason for celebration. There may be opportunity in the midst of everything lost or different to refocus our hearts on the small, beautiful gifts present in each day.

Remember: The contrast of expectations vs. reality of the first Advent and Christmas would have been striking. Imagine having an angel show up telling you that you were to be the Messiah's mum, right after it looked like your life had a new plan and direction. Imagine getting engaged only to find out your spouse-to-be was carrying a child. Imagine being told you needed to travel at a late stage in pregnancy to fulfill a government requirement (Ok maybe we would all be okay with someone telling us to travel right now, but still...). Imagine going to give birth after a long walk and bumpy donkey ride, only to find out delivery would be in a stable.

God still brought about the delivery of love in the midst of that contrast. The fact that our expectations and hopes are vastly different from our realities does not change the fact that the gift of God's love still continues to deliver.

Sometimes that's to us.

And sometimes that's through us.

In peace and love,

*Peace +
M/S*