



MacNab Street Presbyterian Church

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December 14, 2012

Dear friends at MacNab,

I will not be with you in worship this Christmas, so this letter gives me the chance to send my Christmas greetings, and share an Advent reflection.

My experience is that the church typically loves the Christmas story so much that we hardly even notice that the season of Advent, the route of preparation in order to really receive the gift, carries a tone quite different from Christmas itself. The old tradition of the church, shown in the lectionary, is to spend the Season of Advent with John the Baptist, out in the desert, and then to hear Mary's Magnificat. None of that is very comfortable: the desert is not a comfortable place, and Mary's Magnificat: have you paid attention to those words? Both Mary and John, by their words and by the force of their experience, call us to a kind of "stripping down" in Advent, as a way to prepare to receive.

For this reason, over the last number of years, when I get my druthers, I leave the Christmas tree in the sanctuary bare until Christmas Eve. Up and standing, but bare. The bareness of the tree reminds us of the traditional way to receive anything from God: when our hands are emptied, and our hearts bared to One we trust.

Maybe this sounds hard, but therein lies the entire mystery and joy of the Christian faith. Bare IS scary, unless we believe that the One is good, and only desires joy for us. And the practice of "stripping down" or "emptying" does not diminish us, but makes us more. God wants us to be "more" not less.

Leaving a tree bare is not the only way to live into Advent. (Don't worry; it's not an intractable part of my agenda!) We all have "bare" places in our lives. We all have our places of poverty and there are bare places of poverty all around us. We can choose to look at them. They do not need to be places of fear. Maybe we can hold them gently, and pray that our bareness, and the bare places of the world will be exactly the place Christ makes home, because there is room.

Deep bareness of Advent to you,

Deep Joy of Christmas to you,

Cathy
Interim Moderator