

[Story] Three men died on Christmas Eve and were met by Saint Peter at the pearly gates. “In honor of this holy season,” Saint Peter said, “You must each possess something that symbolizes Christmas to get into heaven.” The first man fumbled through his pockets and pulled out a lighter. He flicked it on and said, “It represents a candle.” “You may pass through the pearly gates,” Saint Peter said. The second man reached into his pocket and pulled out a set of keys. He shook them in the air and said, “They’re bells.” Saint Peter said, “You may pass through the pearly gates.” The third man started searching desperately through his pockets and finally he pulled out a pair of women’s glasses. St. Peter looked at the man and asked, “Umm...what do those symbolize?” The man replied, “They’re Carol’s.”

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Christmas! The anticipation of Christmas, Advent, begins officially today according to the church liturgical calendar. No matter how closely we pay attention to the church calendar, especially this year, many of us are surprised when Advent came. It seems too early. “It cannot be time for this,” we opine. And who knows what *opine* means?!? But, it seems to fit this season, not because of the greenery!

We are just not ready; we have too much to do; our lists grow longer; our accomplishments are fewer. For everything we check off, six more slip onto the list. How does that happen? This is where the whole legend about elves came into being—people found their Christmas to-do lists growing almost before their eyes. Who is doing this? It must be elves. We’re not ready. Honestly, I am not ready. I had a hard time last week to prepare myself for Advent. Are there anyone like me? If so, you are at the right place.

Because we are not ready, we need Advent. The creators of the Christian calendar knew that we all would need a “little kick” to get the new year started. By the way, Advent is the beginning of the new liturgical year in Western Christianity. So, it begins with a call to get ready because we are not ready. Worse than that, we have forgotten that there is anything to get ready for. Or we thought that what we are supposed to be getting ready for is a celebration of the past. Surely, we are preparing for a historical observation of something God did at one time—born Jesus unto us. And we are still grateful for it; we are still defined by it; we still try

to live differently because of it. But it is to an extent, old news. It is a case of “been there, done that” when it comes right down to it. Or is it?

What is it that we are waiting for? What are we looking for? Today’s scripture reading reminds us that what we long for is not just a historical remembrance but a new reality, a new encounter. And this new encounter can be shocking; it can wake us up from overlooking what really surrounds us. That is the task of Advent, to pay attention to what is and what might be, not simply to look back at what was.

This year, the foundations of our lives have been shaken. The comforts that we had begun to take for granted were taken from us. The human institutions that we had constructed no longer held the security that we had begun to take for granted. So, we began to look elsewhere, and we realized that our faith was shaky as well. Don’t you think that we need a boost, so we can look back; and also, look forward at the same time?

“Keep Calm...Christmas is Coming” is the theme for Advent Season at Kona United Methodist Church. We have adapted that, of course, from the popular phrase, “Keep Calm and Carry On” that was first developed by the British government in preparing her citizens for the Second World War.

As I contemplated this phrase, I began to think what an appropriate phrase this is to communicate the truths of Christmas. In light of Jesus Christ bursting into our world to bring hope, faith, joy, peace, and most of all, salvation, we of all people, believers in Christ, should “Keep Calm and Carry On.” So, this Advent Season 2020, I am endeavoring to remind us of those reasons associated with Jesus’ coming that we have to “Keep Calm and Carry On.”

Today, I say “Keep Calm...Christmas is Coming: Hope is Here!” Hope? Some of us might question—“What is hope?” Simply, I would say that hope is faith in waiting. Whenever I think about hope, I think about the little boy playing Little League baseball. He is out in the field when his father arrives late for the game. Through the fence his father asks, “Son, what’s the score?” “18-0!” says the little boy, “We’re losing.” Trying to offer comfort to his son, the dad says, “I’m sorry, son.” With the hope only a Little Leaguer could have, the son answers back, “Don’t worry, Dad, we have not even got up to bat yet!” Now, that’s hope. Hope is faith in waiting.

One of the well-known American evangelists, Rev. Billy Graham, says, “My hope does not rest in the affairs of this world. It rests in Christ who is coming again.” Our hope rests in Christ who is coming. So, “Keep Calm...Christmas is Coming: Hope is Here!” Hope is here now with us. Amen.