

Although sharing much common ground when it comes to philosophy and ministry, often Mary and Bob find themselves approaching ministerial concerns from different angles... *He said - She said* is a venue to share differing perspectives and provide food for thought.

Advent

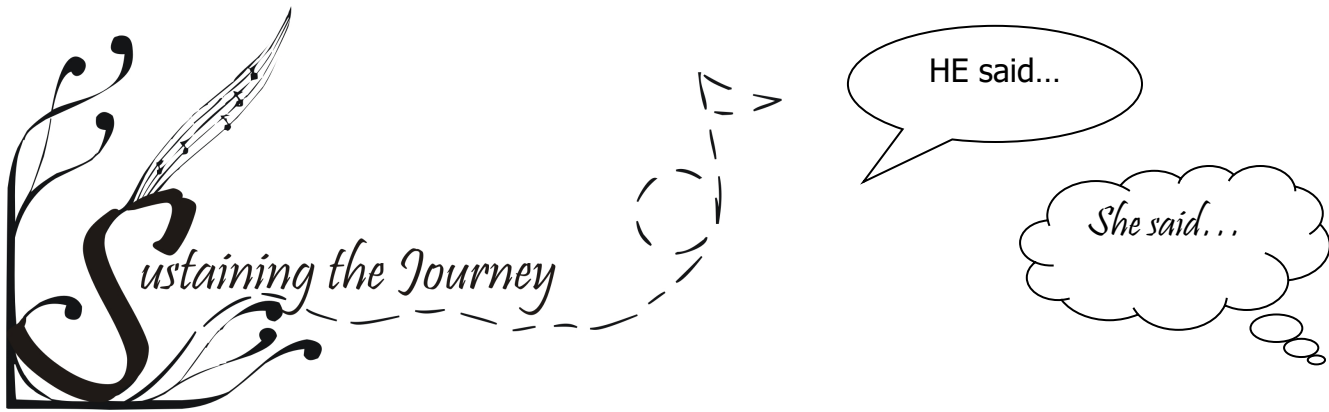
Bob's Perspective

Every time we celebrate Advent Cycle B, I can't help but to be reminded of the hope and comfort these particular scripture readings brought just shortly after we had experienced the horrors of September 11, 2001. Chaos had been thrust into our lives - not unlike those who lived in the time of Jesus. The land of the descendants of Abraham was occupied by the Roman Empire. The people of the land were little more than slaves in their own country. Their religion and traditions were barely tolerated. Their only hope was that God had promised to send a Messiah, one who would deliver them - bringing justice and peace.

While the world situation is still very serious, we're not quite affected in the same way we were 16 years ago. Yet, the global fear we felt at that time has (for many, but not all) been replaced by the despair of the day to day issues that we are all facing; violence, government dysfunction, economy, war, doubts, jobs and family problems.

This Advent Season will focus on hope, reassurance and joyous anticipation. Our hope is in the Paschal Mystery - the birth, death and resurrection of Jesus - whom we worship not only in prayer, but in the way we share and experience community with each other. We are called to reflect this hope - not only in those who gather with us in Church week to week - but also in those who have been away - through invitation, encouragement and welcoming. These are the signs of hope to which we are called during this Advent Season: forgiving, repairing, building and embracing - as Isaiah said, "...the LORD has anointed me...to bring glad tidings to the lowly, to heal the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, to comfort all who mourn..."

O.K....so you may be thinking, "Isn't this the same guy who was ripping on 'Hope' just a couple weeks ago?" (see [HS-SS Blog 11-01-17](#)). I could just blame the seeming incongruence on my stroke and leave it at that, but I won't!



To slightly digress and reiterate: Hope through the eyes of faith is much different than blind hope without foundation. As Christians our 'Hope' is not unfounded. We know the truth and are certain of the outcome based on faith as well as our personal experience and history. Even more – we have the means to bring about much of the change that this 'Hope' promises IF we would only put our faith (not just individually, but corporately) into action.

This year, the Season of Advent will once again instill a sense of hope into our lives, through our Scripture readings, prayers, music and environment. Our music will reflect our hope in God and his redemptive promise as we gather and sing familiar Advents hymns. "O come, O come, Emmanuel, and ransom captive Israel that mourns in lowly exile here until the Son of God appears" may be a historical verse, but is as applicable today (as we await the second coming) as it was many millennia ago.

When Jesus came to us two thousand years ago, it wasn't in the way in which the nation had expected him. Many were waiting for the Warrior King that would lead them into battle and return freedom to the land, and many felt that their prayer for a Messiah had been unanswered. This may be a very appropriate time to express our thankfulness to a God who cares for all our needs, and answers our prayers - sometimes (or even maybe most of the time) in unexpected ways.

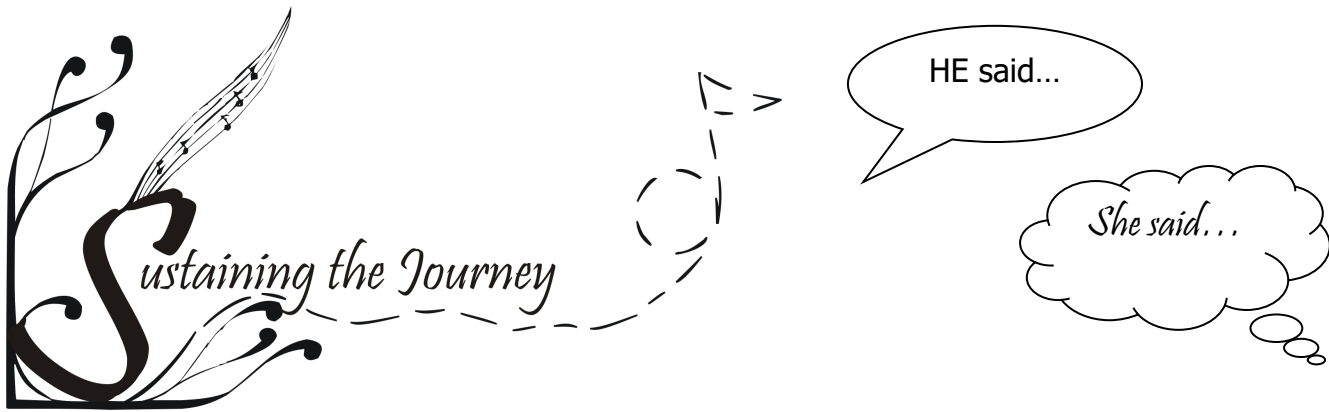
Advent is truly a time for building 'Hope'. What better time is there than this Advent to place our needs and cares before the Lord who came to redeem us and set us free!

Mary's Perspective:

"Be still and know that I am God..." Psalm 46:11

I read a reflection that said a more literal translation of this Scripture would be *let go*, as in unclench your fist and release. This image really struck me, as I sometimes crave more control over factors that may not be in my grasp.

For many years, I would have argued that I am a person of hope. My glass is half full. Susie Sunshine. My children call me The Walking Pep Talk. (Literally, they do - usually rolling their eyes.)



I've always liked Advent. I resonate with the concept of hopeful expectation. I've even wished many times that this season would last longer (both because of the beauty of the season, and to eek in more time for Christmas preparations).

This year, Advent is the shortest it can possibly be. The Fourth Sunday of Advent is December 24, so really it will only feel like three weeks. I have had this sense of foreboding, that it will be a more frenetic time than one of hope. These are the times when, more than ever, I think we need to heed the call to *be still*.

There are times when it can feel like life's bumpy road is taking its toll. Bob and I often say that one of the things we have learned in ministry is that everyone has "stuff". Maybe it's age, or just how times have changed, but our lives can feel less light-hearted and more burdened by challenges. Friends diagnosed with cancer, aging parents, seemingly daily reports of terrible tragedies - it's easy to become overwhelmed and to forget hope. Again... *be still*.

After our last blog, I told Bob we need to lighten things up. Heavy topics and didactic tones do not make for fun reading. So what does he start this one talking about? 9/11... But I digress.

I think the point we're both trying to make is that, even amidst the "stuff", we need to be a people of hope. Perhaps life isn't going the way we would have written the story, but if we unclench and let go, we might see more beauty than we realized was possible. Our faith reassures us that in the midst of chaos comes the Messiah. If we allow ourselves the time to immerse in the Advent season, we might rediscover hope. So, rather than be overwhelmed by trying to cram 4 weeks of Christmas preparation into three, rather than shiver in the cold and be burned out by a myriad of obligations... *be still*. Smell the incense. Appreciate the purple. Sit in front of a cozy fireplace. Snuggle with a loved one. Let go of worry and expectations and "stuff", and give yourself the gift of peace. Calm the frenetic racing and call upon Emmanuel - God with us.

Be still.